

PIG TAILS

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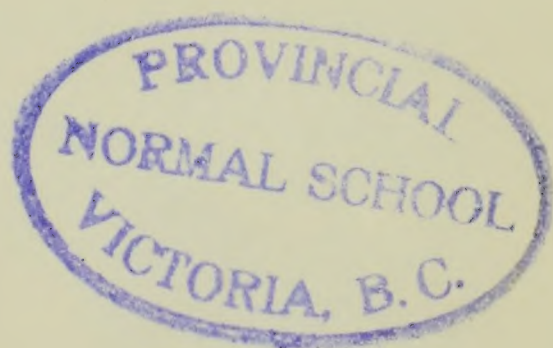
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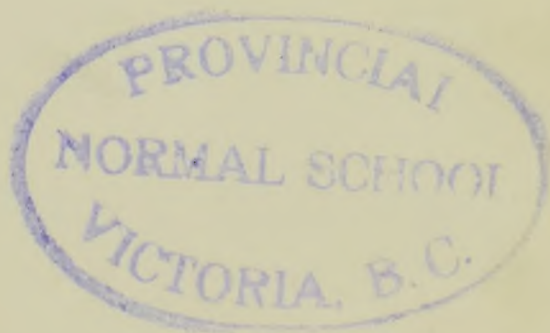
PIG TAILS





THE WEATHER FAIRIES

CHINESE children think of the North, South, East and West winds as weather fairies. The North Wind rides a white horse; Lady West Wind comes on a crane and brings the snow; the East Wind, sometimes called "Old Mother Rain," rides a donkey and carries an umbrella. She shows the tiny deformed foot, caused by binding, which is seldom seen on Chinese women now except in remote districts. South Wind—"Auntie Lightning"—rides a big yellow dog and carries two mirrors, one in each hand, which cause the flashes. Her feet are unbound because she comes from the south where the custom of foot-binding was first abolished.



PIGTAILS

by JOHANNA M. HEKKING

Illustrations by
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Lithographed in the United States of America

This little book is lovingly dedicated to

GRETA, BOBBY AND LECIA.

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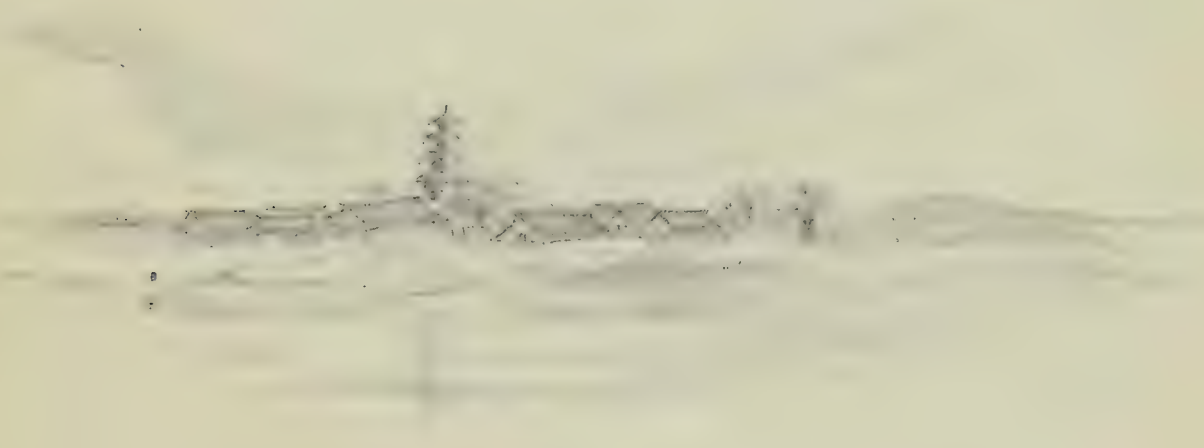
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FOREWORD

If you should start from the western coast of North America, and sail west, ever west, like Christopher Columbus, you would finally arrive in Asia. You might bump up against Japan, and if you went south and then again west, in a day or two the sea would have turned a curious yellowish-brown color. That would mean that you were near China. The yellow color of the water is caused by the soil and earth that is washed far out to sea by China's great rivers.

These rivers are so big and wide and long, that large steamers can go up-stream for weeks, before they come to the place where they can go no further. From there, little boats called sampans, can go farther still for several weeks more!



A little village called San Cha Tse, lies on the bank of the Yangtse Kiang, the greatest river of all. Perhaps these places have just been names in your geography books, but did you ever stop

to think that real people live there? However, San Cha Tse will not be found on any map that you may have. It is not important enough.

San Cha Tse means "Three House Village," because long ago, three families settled in this spot, and built three homes. For a long time it remained so. Gradually more people and more houses came, but the name was unchanged.

Now it has a temple and a tall pagoda, which form the church where the people burn candles and incense when they worship their gods. There is a tea shop, a silk shop, one for cotton and another for oil and sauces. There is a tailor, a carpenter, a shoemaker, and a grain seller.

These shops are all open along the front and only closed at night with sturdy wooden shutters and strong bars. They all face the one street in the village, which is unpaved. There are other houses also which stand about wherever their owners happened to feel like building them. Curiously enough, most of them face south in order to get as much sun as possible.

Most of the houses are built of gray bricks with tiled roofs. Very few have front gardens, and then only when surrounded by high walls. Most of them are built like the letter U and enclose stone paved courtyards. Here there are tubs filled with plants and flowers. Here also the children keep their pets. Ducks and chickens run about, and there may even be a pig or a goat.

Most interesting, however, are the children themselves, and so we will try and tell you something about how they live and what they do.

JOHANNA M. HEKKING

PIG TAILS

GER GER AND MEI MEI



Ger Ger and Mei Mei lived in the village of San Cha Tse. It lay on the river bank, just where the mighty Yangtse Kiang swings around a bend. Their father was the owner of a large rice shop where he sold rice and grain and seed of all kinds. Their family

was not big as families go in China, because there were only four children in all. In addition to Mei Mei and Ger Ger there was a big sister called Dah Fei—a tall slender young lady—and a fat baby brother called Dee Dee. Of course, Ger Ger, Mei Mei, Dah Fei and Dee Dee were not their real names, any more than Dotty and Buddy are yours. They are what the Chinese people call “small names,” and chil-



I

Ger Ger is pronounced like *fur-fur* and means Big Brother; *Mei Mei* is *May-May* and means Little Sister. *Dah Fei* means Big Daughter.

dren are known by them until they grow up. Then the real names come into use, and the others forgotten. These are never, never used any more. That would be insulting.

Ger Ger had once been called Dee Dee. That means Little Brother. In those days the fat baby had not been born, and he had been the baby of the family. One morning when he and Mei Mei had been playing in the courtyard behind the house, his father came out looking very happy.



"You have a new baby brother," he said. "This afternoon you will have to take crimson eggs to all our neighbors."

Mei Mei knew what that meant, because she remembered doing it when Ger Ger was born. She had gone from house to house with a basket of hard-boiled eggs. The shells had been dyed crimson as a symbol that there was a new baby in the family.

In the afternoon she and Ger Ger set out. After taking eggs to many of their friends, they at last arrived at the shop of Shing Kee, the tailor. He was a great friend of their father, and smiled at the two little ones in a friendly way.

"Now you will no longer be called Dee Dee," he said to the little boy. "You are the big brother of the family now, and will have to be called Ger Ger."

The little boy had not thought about that, but now he decided that the tailor was right, and that he *ought* to be called Ger Ger, and the baby Dee Dee. He held himself straight and tall and was very proud of his new name. When he arrived home he told his parents that now he was Ger Ger and not Dee Dee any more. His father laughed and nodded, and from that day Dee Dee was the name of the baby.



Mei Mei was a slender little girl, with a round face, narrow, deep-brown eyes, and smooth black hair that she wore in two braids. Every day her hair was carefully combed and oiled until it shone like satin, and the ends of her pigtails bound tightly with brightly colored wool or silk. She did not wear dresses as little girls do in Europe or America, but a kind of pajama. Her trousers were long and wide, and the little coat had a high collar that fastened closely around her throat. The trousers and coat were almost never the same color, because Chinese people like bright colors and lots of them together.

Ger Ger was a fat little boy. Really, he was more like a ball than a boy, because everything about him was round. He had a

round little head that was smoothly shaven, except for a thick lock of hair on the top. Sometimes this tuft of hair lay flat on his head, and sometimes it was tightly bound with colored wool so that it stood up like a perky little tassel! His fat cheeks shook whenever he ran, and his sturdy body was almost as wide as it was tall. Ger Ger also wore clothes like Mei Mei's, and both children wore cloth slippers that had been embroidered across the toes in bright colors.

When Dee Dee was a month old, a great feast was held in his honor. The whole house was decorated with lanterns. Musicians came and played all day, and tables groaned under their load of good things to eat. All the people who had received



crimson eggs came and brought presents for the baby. Every one brought at least two gifts, sometimes four and even six, but never one or three or five of anything. It is considered very bad manners to give anything in odd numbers. Even numbers are thought lucky in China.

Little Dee Dee was a very fortunate baby. He was given gold bracelets, and rings and neck-bands, embroidered caps, and shoes and coats. The people who did not bring presents, brought shining silver dollars stamped with scarlet good-luck signs, so that the new baby might always have plenty of riches.

It had been a great occasion, and Ger Ger still remembered all the goodies he had eaten. Of course, there had been chicken and duck, and juicy bits of pork and fish, but he also found plates filled with sugared melon and ginger and peanuts. There were spiced arrowroot, candied lotus seeds, and preserved lichees, and ever so many more things of which I do not even know the names. The little fat boy liked the lotus seeds best, and ate a great many of them. They were like soft little nuts, about the size of hazelnuts. They had been taken out of the big green, cup-like seed-pod of the lotus lily, and cooked in sugar until they had become like the candied peel your mother sometimes uses for cake.

Every one had been too busy attending to the many guests to pay any attention to the little boy who wandered among the tables tasting this and that. No one knew that poor little Ger Ger had begun to feel most uncomfortable until Dah Fei found him in a dark corner with tears running down his fat cheeks.

"Why, Ger Ger!" she cried. "What is the matter, Little Brother?"

"I have such a stomach ache," he sobbed. "I feel so sick!"

Dah Fei hurried to call her mother, who came quickly to see what was wrong. She was greatly alarmed and at once sent for a doctor. He was a very important man, and presently ar-

rived in a sedan chair with three bearers. These men had carried the chair on long poles slung on their shoulders, and had run all the way. They were allowed to have some of the good things of the feast, while the doctor went in to see Ger Ger.

The little boy was rather frightened of the stranger's big horn-rimmed spectacles, but he did not say anything. The doctor asked him many questions, and then gave him some dreadfully bitter medicine. Ger Ger did not like it, but he drank it without a murmur. Chinese doctors always give bad-tasting medicine, because they think the illness is caused by some evil spirit, and if the medicine does not taste very unpleasant, the wicked sprite will not go away. This doctor thought that Ger Ger must have swallowed one of these, so that the medicine was very bitter indeed.

Ger Ger's illness did not last long, and the next day he was much better. After that, whenever he ate candy, he always examined it very closely to see if there was an evil spirit on the piece he had chosen.



THE RICE SHOP

THE RICE SHOP

Ger Ger's father was called Chung Shen Sun, which means Mr. Chung. Strangely enough the Chinese people say Chung Mister, instead of the way we do. Mrs. Chung was known as Chung Tai Tai, and of course the children had the name Chung before their given names also. In this way the most important name—that is, the family name—comes first.

Mr. Chung was the owner of one of the largest shops in the village. It was the only rice shop in the place, and any one who needed rice or grain or any kind of seed, bought it there. The family lived behind it in rooms all built around a courtyard. The children loved the shop with its great sacks of rice piled high up to the shadowy ceiling. Across the front was a row of large bins heaped up with the snowy grains.

At the sides, against the walls stood big jars of corn, bran, beans, millet wheat and gao-liang, a kind of grain that grows chiefly in North China and Manchuria. There were peas and beans of all sizes and shapes. The children used to collect them and play games with them. They would line up beans of different colors, like soldiers, and then, with a very large bean, shoot at them, as you shoot marbles, and scatter them.

The most interesting thing about the shop was the way Mr. Chung and his assistants sorted the rice, and Mei Mei and Ger Ger were never tired of watching them. The rice would be poured into large shallow sieves and turned and tossed until all the small and broken kernels had fallen through. These would be placed in a separate bin, and the rest tossed into another sieve.

This would be repeated again and again until only the finest and largest remained, and each quality had been placed in its own bin in tall white heaps.

Ger Ger and Mei Mei knew all about the different grains and beans, and how they grew, except gao-liang. One day Mei Mei asked her father about it because she had never seen it growing.

"It comes from the North," her father explained.

"But why don't we plant it too?" demanded the little girl.

"We have no gao-liang in this part of the country because the soil is not right and too damp. Up in the North the climate is very dry, and the earth is the stiff rich clay that gao-liang needs."

"Does it grow like wheat or rice?"

"No; a field of gao-liang is a fine sight. It is like an army with tall plumed lances. The plumes hold the shiny black seeds, which have to be threshed out at harvest time. The strong thick stalks are used for the fire, and sometimes the poor people weave them together and plaster thick mud over them for houses."

Mei Mei nodded her little head wisely, as though she understood all about it now, and ran away to tell Ger Ger, and to play with the beans.

All kinds of people came to the shop, and the children knew them all. The women on their way to the early morning market in front of the pagoda, stopped to pass the time of day with Mrs. Chung, while their little ones played with Ger Ger and Mei Mei. Sometimes the old gentleman who lived in the big house with the tall iron gates, would come to buy millet for his singing bird. Usually he sent a servant, but when he thought his bird needed a walk (they often do, in China) he would come himself. Then the children would gather round.

"*Ayah, Wang Shen Sun! Nee howla mah?*" ("How do you do!") they would exclaim, and the old gentleman would smile and nod and show them his pretty pet.

Like all people in China, he was a bird lover, and took the lovely lacquered cage with its little inmate for a walk every day in his garden, swinging the cage to and fro. This made the bird sing as if it was trying to burst its little blue throat. Wang Shen Sun was very proud of it because it had come from far away across the sea, and no one in San Cha Tse had ever seen one like it.

Sometimes strangers came to the shop. These people came from the river where the boats lay. It happened sometimes that they ran short of rice and would come to the village to buy more. There was one boy called Ah Ling who came often to Mr. Chung's shop. He did not belong to the village, but his father, a boatman, usually stopped there on his way up or down the river. Ah Ling always stayed to play a while and he told Mei Mei and Ger Ger of wonderful things he had seen in the larger towns he had visited. Ger Ger was rather envious of Ah Ling because he was so big and strong and always seemed to have such good times. Also he almost always went barefooted, because he did not like shoes and kicked them off!

Several times Ah Ling had invited the children to come for a sail in his father's boat. They were very interested in the little vessel where everything seemed so tiny when compared with the big rambling shop and roomy courtyard. Ger Ger would have liked to go, but Mei Mei was frightened. The boat looked so small, and the river was so big and wet that it did not seem at all safe. Ah Ling would laugh at her and, with one big jump, leap on to the tiny deck. Then Ger Ger and Mei Mei would walk soberly home and play with paper boats on a river of brown beans. That certainly was much safer!

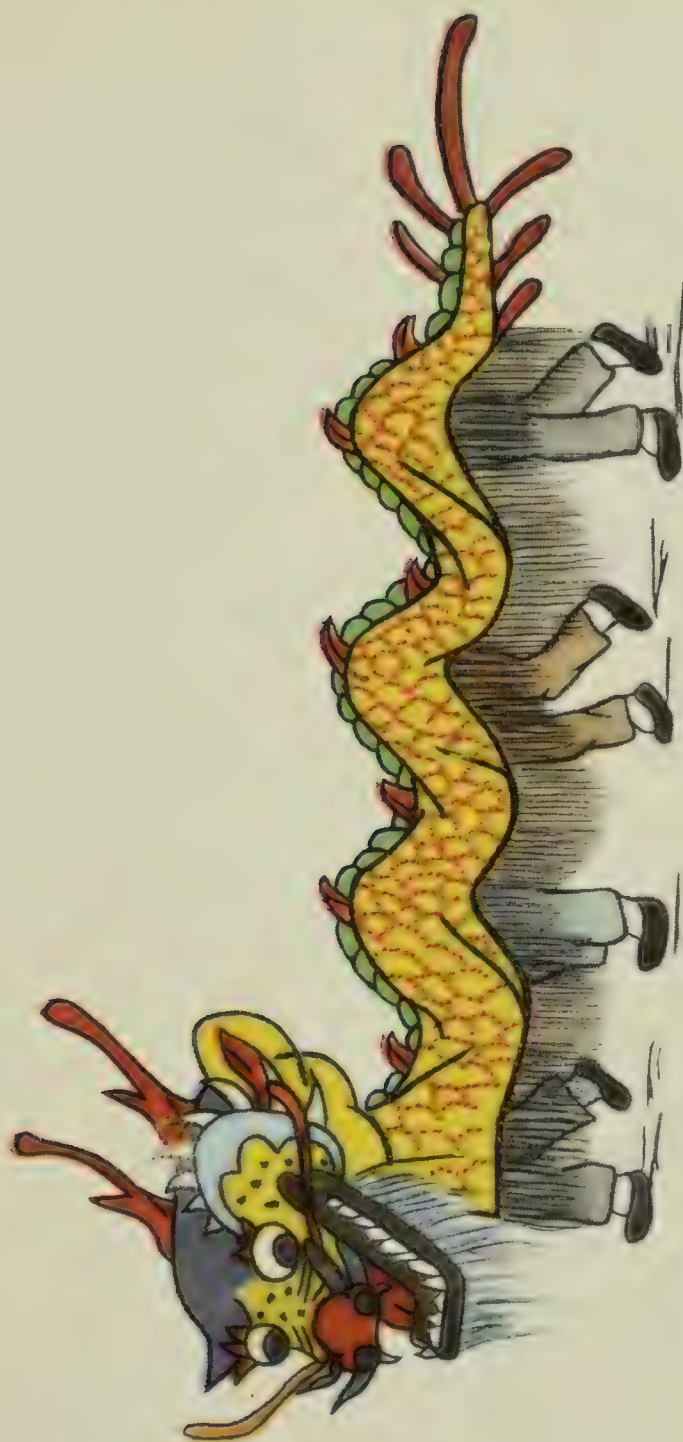


THE FEAST OF LANTERNS

The whole village was very busy. In only two more days the Lantern Festival would take place. This is the first great festival of the year and comes at the end of the New Year celebration that lasts for two exciting weeks.

In the Chung family, both children and grown-ups were occupied with pots of paste, bits of string, and scraps of gilt paper. The lanterns for decorating the house and shop had to be trimmed with golden Good Luck signs, and there were ever so many more to be made for the courtyard. In addition to these, Mr. Chung had bought some very fine ones shaped like lotus blossoms and little white bunnies with pink eyes, that could be pulled along on wheels.

At the end of the village street the people were making a huge dragon. It was made of slender strips of bamboo which formed a light frame work, to be covered with paper. With its tremendous head, ferocious mouth, and long tail, it was an awe-



“ IT WAS AN AWESOME BEAST ”

some beast. It was so big, that a whole line of men, each carrying a light, could get inside it and bear it on their heads and shoulders. Mr. Chung was to carry its head because he was so tall and would be able to hold it high in the air. Of course the children were very proud that their father was to be the leader.

At home they talked of little else, because both Ger Ger and Mei Mei were to be allowed to carry their lanterns in the procession which would go through the town and along the river bank. In the kitchen Mrs. Chung and Dah Fei had prepared dainties for a great feast which would take place before the parade, and the whole family would be present. Even Grandfather and Grandmother had come to San Cha Tse for the event! Ger Ger and Mei Mei were so excited about it all, that every little while they



ran from the courtyard into the shop or the kitchen, only to rush out again to see if others had as many, and as fine lanterns as they.

On the great day, after a wonderful dinner of wheat cakes, meat dumplings, sweet pork, mandarine fish, and spiced duck, the family brought out their finest lanterns. The houses of the village looked very lovely with their many-colored lights, and the street was like a picture of fairy land. Along the road to the river tall poles had been set up, each with a string of eight or ten lanterns swinging from it. Everywhere were bobbing lights of scarlet and crimson, rose and gold.

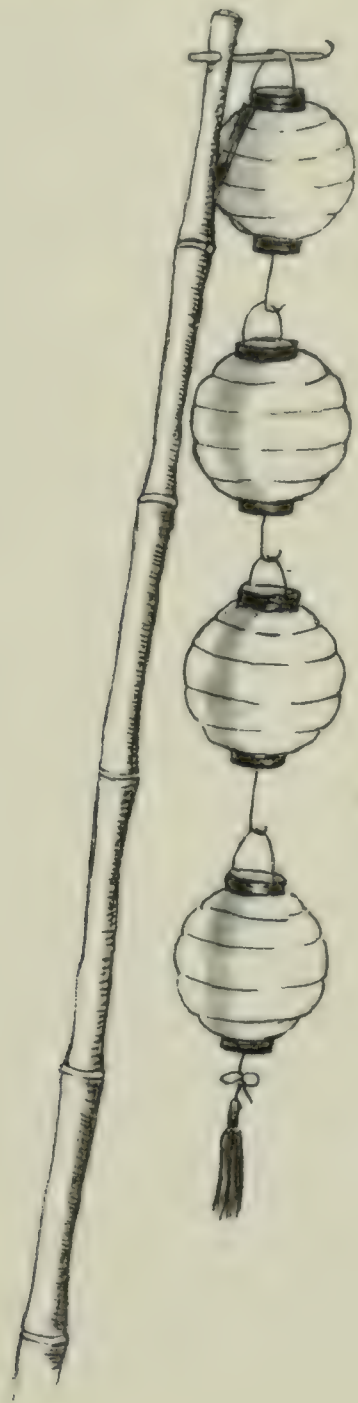
At one end of the street the children could hear the sound of gongs and drums. There, sure enough, was the enormous dragon. They managed to get places just behind it, and when all the candles had been lighted the procession started off. Down the village street, in and out among the houses, and along the river bank they followed the dragon's lead, while drums and gongs were beaten and the crowd looked on.

Near the foot of the pagoda they stopped. At the entrance of the temple, in a cloud of incense smoke, fire crackers were banging and snapping, while the crowd shouted and clapped their hands, and added to the joyful noise. In the confusion Ger Ger slipped up to the big dragon and pulled out one of its eyes. Immediately there was a scramble for the other. Ger Ger was very proud of his prize, and waving it over his head, ran home as fast as he could, while the other boys watched him enviously.

Can you imagine what Ger Ger wanted with that dragon's eye? I am sure you could not in a hundred years! Well, in China the farmers believe if they are lucky enough to secure the dragon's eye, their hens will lay well, and not a single baby chicken will die or be lost during the year.

Ger Ger, to be sure, was not a farmer's son, but his grandfather lived in the country, and it was for him that Ger Ger

wanted the precious charm. The little boy arrived home quite out of breath and proudly gave his trophy to his grandfather. The old gentleman was delighted and promised him the first little rooster of the year for his very own.



THE STORY-TELLER

One day, just after the Lantern Festival, the children who were playing in the village street heard a clear ringing sound in the distance.

"Listen," said Mei Mei. "Hear the old story-teller's gong. Run and get some coppers for him, Ger Ger, and we will ask him to come and tell us some stories."

Ger Ger ran away as fast as his fat little legs could go, while the other children went to meet the old man they all knew so well. He was rather a wonderful person, who traveled up and down the country from one place to another, telling old tales and fables. The children welcomed him with shouts of joy, and there was always a group around him listening intently. He told stories of animals and birds, of heroes, fairies, and great emperors.

He would sit with his back against a sunny wall, telling tale after tale, until it was almost time to go. Then he would allow the children to choose a story that was a special favorite. Ger Ger begged for the story of the tiger.

Now I must tell you that the tiger is the most wonderful animal the Chinese people know. He is their symbol for strength and cleverness and swiftness. His striped coat is copied for baby clothes, and medicines are named after him. In spite of this, I suppose tigers can be outwitted, and so the old story-teller related how this had been done, banging his little gong at the most exciting moments. It was called . . .

How the Frog Conquered the Tiger

Long ago, when all the animals still understood one another,

an old tiger went out hunting for some food. He was very hungry, and ready to eat anything, and he decided to make his dinner of the first thing he could find. As he was creeping along very quietly near the bank of a stream, a frog saw him and was badly frightened.

"That tiger looks hungry," he said to himself. "He may want to eat me up. Shall I hide or shall I try to frighten him away?"

The frog decided that it was no use trying to hide because the tiger's keen nose would soon get his scent, so he climbed up on a large stone and puffed himself up as big as he could. When he was sure the tiger had seen him, he gave a loud croak.

"Hello, where are you off to?" asked the frog.

"I am going into the forest to find something to eat," replied the tiger. "But you seem nice and fat, and although you won't satisfy my hunger, I might as well start on you."

"You can't eat me," said the frog. "I am the King of all the frogs, and can do anything I like. Why, you couldn't even catch me!"

"I don't believe you. I could catch you with one little jump!" scoffed the tiger.

"Very well, let us see who can jump farthest across the river, and I will prove it to you," the frog replied.

The tiger was willing, and so both of them stood on the bank of the little stream, ready to take a big jump. Just as the tiger crouched down to take his leap, the frog took the end of his tail in his mouth, and when the tiger sprang, the little frog was carried across with him, and flung far up the other side of the river bank! The tiger looked around on every side but did not see him.

"What are you looking for, down there?" called the frog. "I am up here."

The tiger looked, and there, sure enough, was the frog much farther away from the river than he!

"You see, I've beaten you easily in jumping. Now I will show you how I can spit."

Then they started spitting. The tiger was not very successful, but the frog spat out some of the tiger's tail hairs, that were left in his mouth. The tiger saw these hairs in astonishment.

"How did you manage to do that?" he asked.

"Oh, that is nothing at all," said the frog. "Yesterday I killed and ate a tiger, and these are only a few of his hairs that got caught in my teeth."

When he heard this, the tiger began to be afraid.

"This frog seems so small and harmless, yet he jumped further than I could, and yesterday he killed and ate a tiger. He may eat me too if I stay here much longer," he said to himself. So mumbling some excuse, he began to hurry away.

"Wait, I am coming with you," called the frog, but the poor hungry tiger was too frightened to look around. He took to his heels and ran away as fast as he could into the forest, while the little frog remained behind safely in the river.

The children laughed and clapped their hands. Ah Ling, who had just arrived in the village, had never heard the tale and was delighted. He jumped up and down, and kicked off the shoes he hated so much, so that one flew high over the heads of the other children. The old story-teller glanced around.

"Gently, gently, my son," he said. "You are no longer a small child, and must give thought to your manners."

"I hate my shoes. They are so uncomfortable!" cried Ah Ling. "On the boat I never wear shoes, but my father makes me put them on when I come to the village."

"If you wear your hat
On the side of your head,
You'll have a lazy wife, 'tis said.
If a ragged coat and slipshod feet,
You'll have a wife who loves to eat,"

quoted the old man.



THE STORY-TELLER

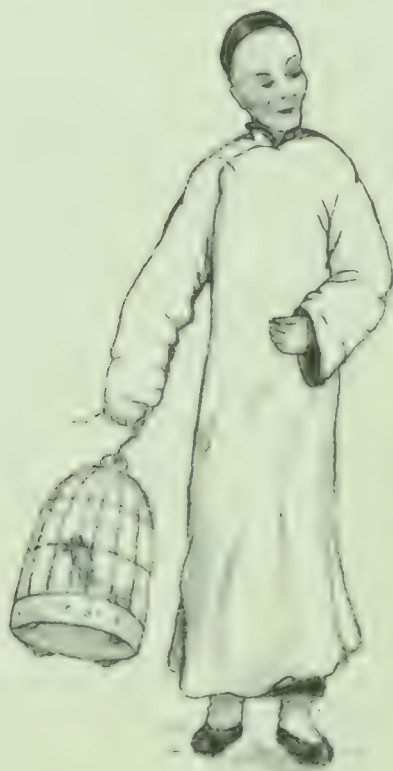
"I like to eat too," said Ah Ling, "especially just now."

The old man glanced at the sky, and saw that the noon hour had come. Ger Ger's plump hand dived into the pocket of his jacket, and he counted out some broad brown coppers into the story-teller's hand. Ah Ling hunted in his pockets also, and found a few coins among some marbles and bits of string. These he handed to the old man too. Mei Mei picked up fat little Dee Dee and started home. The baby was heavy and she had to walk slowly, but the boys did not wait for her. They scampered away as fast as their feet could carry them, in order to repeat the wonderful tales they had heard.

BUILDING A HOUSE

If people in Europe or America want to build a house, they make their plans, and call the builders, and go ahead. Not so in China. There are many things to be done first . . . things that no one in any other country would think important, and yet, in China, they are most necessary!

Wang Shen Sun . . . which means Mr. Wang . . . was the old gentleman who lived in the big house behind the high wall. He was the owner of the singing bird from over the sea, and some-



times came to the rice shop to buy food for it. Wang Shen Sun's eldest son was going to be married, and the old gentleman was about to build a house for him.

When Ger Ger and Mei Mei heard about it, they were very interested. Apart from the festivals, life in the village was very dull indeed, so the children, and even the older people hailed anything new with joy.

The first thing Wang Shen Sun did, was to visit the fortune-teller. This wise man cast a horoscope—which means that he consulted the stars—and burnt a stick of incense. He asked the old gentleman his name, then his son's name and birthday. He looked up the exact time of the moon and sun, and then . . . after a long problem in arithmetic, he picked out a lucky day!

When the time came, workmen and building materials arrived and everything was in readiness to begin, but do you think anything could be done? Not a bit of it! First Wang Shen Sun and his son came with a huge bunch of ghost money and incense, which they burnt as offerings to the gods. They hoped that this would make them good-humored, and that their blessing would fall on the new home. When this had been done, then the workmen were allowed to make a start.

Tall poles were placed upright at the four corners, where the intersecting walls would be. At the top of each pole was a little bunch of fir branches waving in the breeze. These branches were put up to frighten away evil spirits that might come near the new building. The Chinese people think that evil spirits can only fly in a straight line, and never *around* anything! Now, if one of these wicked sprites, intent on mischief-making, came along, it would get all tangled up in the fir branches. This would frighten it so much, that when it finally did get away, it would warn all the others to stay away from that dangerous place also!

For the same reason the workmen hung little mirrors from the

roof tree and cross beams. If one of the wicked ones should come along, and see itself in the mirror, it would be so frightened of its own ugly face that it would turn right around and fly back to where it came from.



Of course Mei Mei and Ger Ger and Dee Dee watched all these proceedings with much interest, and built houses with bricks, and dug tunnels in the big piles of sand that lay about, just as children do in every other country.

When all the poles were in place, the most important ceremony of all was performed. Just where the front door was to be built, a small hole was dug in the ground. A little box containing a small piece of silver was laid in the hole, and then the big slab of stone for the doorstep was dropped in place. Now the actual building could commence! That little piece of silver was placed under the doorstep so that the door gods would have something to guard, and if they guarded that bit of silver, they would also keep watch over all the other silver and money in the house. Some more ghost money was burnt, a few last bows made, and Wang Shen Sun and his son went home. Of course Mei Mei, Ger Ger and Dee Dee remained playing in the sand with the other children of the village, and no doubt getting sadly in the way of the workmen!

THE SUN FESTIVAL

"Today the dragon raises his head."

Dah Fei greeted the children one morning with this saying. Ger Ger did not know what she meant, but Mei Mei had heard it before. When Dah Fei saw the little boy's puzzled face she explained:

"On the second day of the second moon the dragon wakes from his long winter sleep, and all the little insects wake up with him. If you look closely, you will see them again for the first time this year."

"Why?" asked Ger Ger.

"The wise old men say, 'The plants on the mountain have turned to jade,' " said Dah Fei, "meaning that the days have become longer and that winter is over. The tips of the willows and other plants have turned green, so today we must make some sun-cakes, and place them in the courtyard so that the sun can see we have not forgotten him."

"Why?" asked Ger Ger again.

"When the sun warms the earth enough, so that the plants can grow, every one is thankful that the winter is over, so we offer cakes to the sun," said Dah Fei. "The farmers will take the baby rice-plants out of the forcing beds. There they have been growing until they are strong enough to be put out-of-doors. You will see that the rice fields will be flooded tomorrow, and on the next day the new green rice-shoots will be planted in the shallow water. Sometimes, if everything goes well, the farmers can get three rice harvests in one year. Also, Grandfather will soon be having little chickens. You will like that, won't you?"



THE FROG GOD'S SHRINE WAS ABOUT AS BIG AS A DOLL'S HOUSE

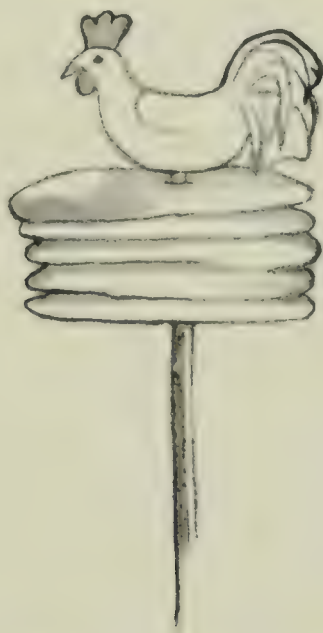
The little boy's face beamed at the thought of his promised pet.

"May we help you make the sun-cakes?" asked Mei Mei.

Dah Fei nodded.

"Yes, you may help place the cakes on the little sticks with the red sugar rooster, if you like."

The children did like, so they followed Dah Fei into the kitchen. Sun-cakes look somewhat like griddle cakes, and Mei Mei and Ger Ger thought their big sister very clever as they watched her flip the flat cakes over from one side to the other. When they were ready, a short, smooth piece of bamboo was run through the middle



of each so that there were five cakes on each stick. The children did this as their share of the work, and the greatest fun of all was to place the red candy rooster on top of each little pile. The rooster was supposed to live in the sun and to crow when it is time for the sun to wake up the world for a new day.

Mei Mei enjoyed helping her sister very much. Soon Dah Fei would be getting married, and then it would be the little girl's duty to help her mother in big sister's place. At present Dee Dee was in

her charge, but this morning the baby was safely stowed away in his play-pen.

When the sun-cakes were ready, they were placed on a table in the sunniest spot in the courtyard. The family and servants were warned, and every one came out to make their bows to the sun. Mr. Chung brought out a big bunch of ghost money in the shape of little silver paper boats, to burn to the Sun God.

Ger Ger was sorry to see them all go up in smoke. Only the night before he and Mei Mei had spent a long time folding the little slips of paper into shape, and it had been quite a difficult task for Ger Ger's fat little fingers. When they had been folded the children had strung them on threads and tied them into a big shining bunch. They had been very pretty.

"Why do we burn all these nice shiny boats right after it took us so much trouble to make them?" the little boy asked indignantly.

"Sh," whispered Mei Mei.

Ger Ger waited impatiently until the last wisp of smoke had floated away. Then,

"Why do we burn the silver boats?" he asked again.

Dah Fei looked down at her little brother and smiled.

"You know that the gods and the spirits live in the sky, don't you, Ger Ger?"

The boy nodded, and Dah Fei continued:

"And of course we have to remember them and make offerings. Well, we cannot send them real silver money, so we buy silver paper and fold it into a shape like the old-fashioned tael, which was used before we had round coins, and burn it. In this way the spirit of the money goes straight to the spirits and the gods who are waiting to receive it."

"Don't the wrong spirits ever get it?"

"No, I don't think so. Those spirits must know all about our special days, and I do not think they would be allowed in Heaven

if they were dishonest, do you?"

Ger Ger shook his head. Of course, it would never do to permit such a thing. Nevertheless, it worried him, and he made up his mind to ask Grandfather about it, next time he saw him. Grandfather was very old, and knew almost everything.

He made his last bows quickly, because he had nearly forgotten them, and then turned to hear what his father was saying.

"We must not forget the Frog God," he said.

"But, Father, we are not farmers," Mei Mei said in surprise.

"No, we are not farmers," answered her father, "but we depend on the farmers for food, and the Frog God is the friend of every one who lives on the land or near the river."

Leaving one servant behind to attend to the shop, the whole family set out, taking with them a little wine and sweet pork as offerings. On their way they met others going in the same direction, and because every one knew everybody else, there was much laughter and good-natured teasing.

The temple of the Frog God was a tiny shrine about as big as a doll's house under a willow tree near the river bank. It was made of gray bricks and the little roof tree was gracefully curved. In spite of the shrine's small size, the people were very fond of this little god, because they believed that he could keep the river from overflowing and ruining the crops.

At the shrine every one offered the bowls of rice and dishes of other food they had brought, and burnt ghost money and incense until a cloud of fragrant smoke drifted across the bare fields. When the last bows had been made, the whole company started home again. They were all happy because it had been a fine day, and they felt that the planting season had started well. When they reached home, Mei Mei and Ger Ger were a little tired, and to amuse them Dah Fei showed them how to fold little paper temples.

DAH FEI TELLS A STORY

Mei Mei and Ger Ger were playing in the courtyard. Dee Dee was there also, and wanted to play too, but sometimes he was sadly in the way, because of course every one knows that you simply cannot play hop-scotch and look after a fat baby at the same time! Poor Mei Mei was very tired of it after a while, but Dee Dee was such a nice baby that she could not be angry with him for long.

Dah Fei came out of the door and placed a pot of gaily blooming azaleas in the sunniest spot she could find. She had just bought the plant from a pedlar at the door and she admired the brilliant blossoms very much. For a moment she stood watching the children at their game, while Mei Mei stopped to get her breath



and to pull Dee Dee out of Ger Ger's way. Overhead flew a long line of wild ducks in a wide V-shape, and Dah Fei pointed them out to the children.

"Warm weather will soon be here," she said. "You can always tell when the wild ducks return to the north."

"Why do they come here?" asked Ger Ger.

"In the north the lakes and rivers are frozen fast all winter and there is no place for them to live, so in autumn they come here to the south where there is plenty for them to eat in our lakes and marshes. Now, when summer is coming they will return to their home in the north."

"Ducks have such pretty colors," said Mei Mei. "I saw some in Wang Shen Sun's pond the other day."

"Do you know why the wild duck has a green cap?" asked the older sister.

Both children shook their heads. Dah Fei knew many wonderful tales, because she had once spent a year in the country with her grandmother, and had heard the old folk tales there. She went indoors for a moment and returned with Dee Dee's playpen, and placed him in it. Then she sat down on a bench between the two children, and told them the story of . . .

How the Wild Duck got his Green Cap

"Long ago," said Dah Fei, "when all the animals were still friends, a rabbit and a frog were playing together on top of a hill. They played near a tall thick bush, and suddenly both of them saw a beautiful jade green pot lying underneath it. Both wanted it, and neither one was willing for the other to have it.

" 'I saw it first!' said the frog.

" 'No, I did!' said the rabbit.

" 'I saw it first, because I am closer to the ground,' stated the frog.

“ ‘Impossible,’ replied the rabbit. ‘I saw it first because I am so much taller and can see farther.’

“And so it went on and on without end. They quarreled and quarreled, each getting more and more angry, until they were shouting at each other. At that moment a wild duck came flying by, and seeing that there was a disagreement, stopped to find out what it was all about.



“ ‘What is the matter?’ he asked.

“The rabbit explained how they had found the green jade pot, and said that, although he had seen it first, the frog would not let him have it. The frog then cried out that it was just the other way about. He had seen the green pot first, but the rabbit was a dishonest fellow and claimed it as his!

“ ‘Well,’ said the duck, ‘I will help you. Why don’t you run a race from the bottom of the hill to the pot, and whoever wins, gets it.’

“The rabbit was well pleased, but the frog did not like it at all, because he knew it was impossible for him to have even a chance of winning. That rabbit had such very long, strong legs!

“ ‘Let us run the race tomorrow. Then we will not be tired as

we are now after playing so long,' suggested the frog.

"Both the rabbit and the duck agreed, so they all went down the hill to their homes to rest and be quite fresh for the morrow.

"Now, that frog was an artful fellow. He had two brothers so much like himself, that no one could tell them apart, and he asked them to help him play a trick on the rabbit. One brother was to stand with the rabbit at the starting point of the race, and at the signal begin to run as hard as he could. The second brother was to wait about half way of the distance to be run, and when he saw the rabbit coming he would start running also. The frog himself would wait near the end of the course near the jade pot.

"At sunrise the next day, the first frog-brother and the rabbit toed the line in readiness for the starting signal. In the half light the rabbit did not notice any difference in his opponent. The wild duck was there to see them start, and at the word 'go,' off they went. The rabbit ran much faster than the frog-brother, and was soon out of sight. Then the frog stopped and went home. When the rabbit was almost half way, the second frog-brother saw him coming, and started hopping along as hard as he could go. The poor rabbit was panting very hard, and was very much surprised to see that the frog had caught up with him.

".'That frog must have passed me in the long grass at the side of the road. He can go much faster than I thought. I was sure I had left him far behind,' thought the rabbit to himself.

"He hurried on as fast as he could go, and soon caught up with the second brother, passed him, and left him far behind. The rabbit ran on and on, until he was very tired, and had to stop and rest a while. Then he went on again, but when he arrived near the top of the hill, the frog saw him coming. The frog then took three long leaps, and placed his foot on the jade pot to show that he was the winner. The rabbit was very disappointed, but without saying anything he turned around and went home.

"The frog was left behind with his lovely pot, but it was so heavy he could hardly move it. He tugged and pulled and pushed and could roll it a little, but to carry it home was impossible. Presently his friend, the wild duck, came along, and seeing that the frog was in trouble again offered to help him once more.

" 'Break the pot in two pieces, and let me carry half, while you carry the other half. Later it can be mended,' he said.

"The frog thought it was a good idea, and with a sharp stone carefully cracked it lengthwise, as the duck suggested. Then the duck told him to place half the pot on his head so that it would not be in the way when he flew. The frog did so, fitting it tightly



so that it could not fall off. He then took the other half of the pot and went home. When he arrived he found the duck waiting for him.

"The frog tried to get the pot off the duck's head, but it would not come off. He pulled and pulled but it was too tightly fitted. He called his brothers and they pulled. Then they pulled all together but it was of no use. At last they had to give up, and the poor duck had to fly away with half the green jade pot on his head. There it remained forever, and since then, they say, the wild ducks have green caps."

* * *

The children laughed.

"Of course, it isn't really true," said Mei Mei, "but it is a nice story anyway."

"Tell us another story," begged Ger Ger, but Dah Fei shook her head.

"Another day," she said. "Now it is almost time for me to wash the rice for lunch."

She returned indoors, and Mei Mei and Ger Ger went back to their game of hop-scotch, while Dee Dee watched them from his play-pen.



A NEW GAME

Ah Ling came racing up to the rice shop one day. The boat had just arrived on its way up the river, and lay moored at the little wooden jetty at the end of the village street.



THEY SLOWLY TROOPED UP THE VILLAGE STREET

"Mr. Chung," he cried, "my father asks if you will be so kind, and send down five catties* of second quality rice to the boat."

"To the usual place?" asked Ger Ger's father.

"Yes, please; and may I stay and play with Mei Mei and Ger Ger until sundown?"

"Surely. I will go and call them," said the shopkeeper.

Ah Ling and the children were very glad to see one another again. It had been a long time since the river boy had come to the village.

"I know a new game, but we must have several more boys and girls, and each must have a stick. It's great fun," he told them.

Mei Mei and Ger Ger were only too glad to learn a new game, and they at once set out to call some more children. In less time than it takes to tell, they had a whole crowd. There are always so many children in Chinese families, that it is easy to get a group together. Ah Ling led them to the empty market place at the foot of the pagoda.

"Have you all got sticks?" he asked.

"Yes! Yes!" they shouted in answer.

Ah Ling told them to form a large circle and to dig a little hole in the ground with the end of their sticks where they stood. In this each placed his stick. Ah Ling himself stood in the center and dug a somewhat larger hole. From his pocket he took a ball and tossed it to one of the other children.

"Now, you . . . what is your name?" he asked.

"Ding Foo," was the reply.

"Ding Foo, you must try and hit the ball into this big hole," Ah Ling said, pointing to the large hole at his feet. "And I must try to keep it out with my stick. Of course, the ball will go here and there, but you must all be ready for it. While you are all trying to hit the ball into this hole, I shall be trying to steal one of your holes by putting my stick into it. You must try and

* A catty measures about a pound and a half.

stop me. See?"

"Suppose both of us put our sticks into one hole?" asked Mei Mei.

"If that happens, both put our sticks into the hole and walk around it. The sticks will twist and one of them will pop out. The owner of that stick will then take the center place. Do you all understand?"

They all nodded their heads, and then Ah Ling went on:

"When the ball goes into the middle hole, you all change places by moving one place to the left, at the same time I will try to steal one of your places, so you must be quick. The one who loses his place must be center player. Every one ready?"

"Yes!" they all shouted once more, and the game began.*

Ding Foo drove the ball toward Ah Ling, who knocked it back again. To and fro it flew between the outer circle of children and the middle. They all tried to drive the ball into the big hole, but the river boy was too quick for them. It was hard work. His face grew red and shiny, and his bare brown feet moved almost too quickly to be seen. It was great fun and every one enjoyed it. Then suddenly the game changed.

Ah Ling sent the ball toward Mei Mei, and while she was trying to hit it back again, he darted forward and placed his stick in her hole. A cheer went up from the others, and Mei Mei had to take the place in the center. She was not as quick or as clever as Ah Ling, and very soon Ger Ger had driven a swift shot past her, right into the hole she was guarding.

"Change places!" shouted Ah Ling.

There was a scramble as all moved over to the next place. This time Mei Mei was ready, and quick as a wink she had placed her stick into Ding Foo's hole. It was now his turn to be center player, and the game began all over again. The children found

* This game is very much like the game of "Shinny" played by boys and girls in America.

it good fun. Such laughing and shouting had not been heard in the village for a long time, and they played all afternoon until the sun was low, and the market place in shadow.

"I'm hungry," suddenly announced Ger Ger.

Every one laughed, because Ger Ger was *always* hungry.

Ah Ling looked at the sun.

"It's almost supper time, so we had better stop now, and we can play again next time I come," he said. .

All the children walked down to the river with the boy, and watched him as he leaped on to the deck of the boat. With a last wave of his hand he dived into the little cabin and was gone. The others turned and slowly trooped up the village street, where the yellow lamp light was beginning to shine through the open doors.



A TRIP UP THE RIVER

On the third day of the third moon comes the earliest spring festival. At that time all the people go to their old family homes. Like Decoration or Memorial Day in America, all the graves are visited and decorated, and respect is paid to the ancestors. But before all this can take place there are many preparations to be made.

On the chosen day Mei Mei, Ger Ger and the baby were called early. The sun was not yet up, and they thought it strange to be eating breakfast by lamp-light. They were all dressed in their best, and Ger Ger's fat cheeks shone red from the scrubbing he had given them. Mei Mei's dark hair had been oiled until it was satin-smooth like her mother's. Mei Mei's hair was really not quite black. It had a brownish tinge as the hair of many Chinese girls has, because they comb it with water, and as they never wear a hat, the sun bleaches it a little. Chinese ladies always comb their hair with a thick black oil, and so, on this important occasion, Mei Mei's hair was oiled and bound with bright green silk.

Dee Dee wore a new bonnet that Dah Fei had made for him, and his little black eyes looked out sleepily from under the frill. He had on a new blue coat, and on his feet he had tiger shoes, so that he would learn to be as sure-footed as that animal.

When all was in readiness, Mr. Chung took Ger Ger by one hand and carrying a lighted lantern in his other, led the way to the river, followed by the rest of the family. Dah Fei carried a large basket of lunch. Mother had a bundle of clean clothes, and Mei Mei and Dee Dee came slowly behind. The fat baby was very heavy to carry, so that after a few steps Mei Mei put him down and let



him walk. Down by the river they found Ah Ling waiting for them, and he helped them to climb onto the boat. They were to make the trip to the village of Wong Chuen by river, where one of Mr. Chung's brothers lived. They would spend the night with him and his family, and the next day, they would all go together to Grandfather's house in the hills.

At first the children were a little frightened, because they were afraid they might fall off the boat, but after a while they became braver and let Ah Ling show them the little cabin with its tiny cupboards. It was clean and neat, and nothing was out of place. Just as the river boy finished stowing away the lunch basket and other things, his father called him. Ah Ling went to the tiller of the boat, while his father pulled strongly at a rope. Up went a big brown sail, and when the wind caught it, the boat slid gently away from the shore. Slowly it became lighter as the sun rose, and after a few minutes there was a lovely sky of rose and gold to promise them a beautiful day.

Wong Chuen is pronounced *Wong Choo-en*.

Ah Ling was too busy to play with the children, but he could talk to them and tell them about all the things they saw on the shores slipping by, and of the various boats on the river. After a while Dee Dee fell asleep. Ger Ger and Mei Mei were sleepy also, because they were unaccustomed to being wakened so early, but they were far too interested to take a nap. There was a delightful lunch at noon, because Mrs. Chung had taken seasoned eggs, meat dumplings, mandarine oranges, and sugared peanuts, all things that the children especially liked.

During the afternoon, they passed many villages and towns that lay by the river just as their own village did. Gradually the hills and mountains became more distinct. At first they had been dimly visible and far away, but they became clearer now, as the travelers neared the end of their journey. Late in the afternoon they arrived in the village of Wong Chuen, where they were to meet Mr. Chung's brother. He was waiting for them on the river bank and waved to them from afar. Mr. Chung arranged with the boat-man to take them home again in a week's time, and the children waved good-bye to Ah Ling, and then ran to meet their uncle.

He took them home, where his little daughter, She Fee, was waiting for them. She was very glad to see them and laughed when she saw the fat baby, whom she had never seen before. Ger Ger and Mei Mei had much to tell her, and there was a steady stream of chatter until it was time to go to bed. It seemed very strange not to sleep in their own beds, but they were so tired that it did not prevent them from falling asleep. Ger Ger was nodding sleepily as Dah Fei undressed him, and Mei Mei could hardly see what she did as she put Dee Dee to bed.

She Fee, pronounced Sh' Fee, means snow-flake.

THE FESTIVAL OF CLEAR WEATHER

The children were still having their early tea and rice the next morning, when they heard shouts in the courtyard. They rushed out of doors and saw that eight sedan chairs had arrived. Sedan chairs are just plain wicker chairs with loops at their sides, and with poles thrust through these loops. The poles are placed on the shoulders of two men who carry both the chair and the passenger.

"Children, children, come back and finish your breakfast. It is not nearly time to go yet, and you will have plenty of time to sit in those chairs bye and bye," said Mrs. Chung.

Ger Ger, Mei Mei and She Fee slowly returned to the house and ate their rice. They were very impatient to go but there was still an hour to wait. To keep them happy Mr. Chung bought them some sugared crab apples on a stick. These crab apples were so good. Outside there was a shiny, crackly sugar coating, and when the children bit through it there was the juicy sweet-sour apple. There were about six of these lovely bites on each stick. Many Chinese candies are made this way, not only from apples, but from little oranges, kumquats and water-chestnuts.

At last, when every one and everything was ready, Mr. Chung told them each to take a chair. The carriers shouted, the poles creaked as they were lifted to the men's shoulders, and away they went. It was great fun. The children were quite comfortable in the big roomy chairs that swayed gently from side to side at each step the men took.

Gradually they left the houses of the town behind, and the road wound up into the hills. There was so much to see that Ger Ger and Mei Mei did not know where to look. The way led over a

little moss-covered stone bridge that spanned a bubbling brook. Mei Mei and Ger Ger were used to the broad Yangtse that always flowed so quietly and so they liked that noisy little stream very much. The men took them deeper into the hills. Groves of tall, graceful bamboo shaded the path, and all kinds of ferns and brightly colored flowers grew on either side. Up and up and up they went. When they glanced backward they could see the village getting tinier until it looked like a toy town. Far below they could hear the little brook singing. Occasionally the chair men had to stop for a rest. Once they stopped at a red walled temple and the grey clad monks brought them some tea.

After a while they went on once more. Mei Mei was sure that the chair carriers had taken a wrong road and that they would never arrive at Grandfather's house. She was getting a bit uneasy, when the path made a sudden turn, and the hills gave way to a broad and lovely green valley. There, tucked away in a fold of the hills, was a little village, standing among green rice fields, and sheltered from the cold winter winds by groves of dark green firs. As soon as Mei Mei saw this valley she recognised it, and knew they were almost at the end of their journey.

In addition to the grandparents there were also an aunt and a young uncle waiting to greet the travelers. For a moment every one talked at once. Then the bundles and baskets were unfastened, the chair men paid off, and every one trooped into the house. There was a delightful cold meal waiting for them, but not even hot tea was served. On the day before the Festival of Clear Weather all the fires are allowed to go out, so that all may be reminded what a great gift fire is to the whole world, and so every one eats cold food. The travelers did not mind at all. They were all so happy and so hungry, that everything tasted good.

After their lunch the young farmer uncle took the children out to see some new little chickens. There were also nine little black

pigs, and the children stood for a long time looking at them. Pigs in China are very dark gray or black—almost never white. It was just feeding time and they gobbled their food in a dreadful manner.

"They are even greedier than Ger Ger," said Mei Mei.

"I'm not greedy!" announced Ger Ger angrily.

"Yes, you are. Don't you know that Father always says not to be a greedy little pig?"

The little fat boy did not like this, because it was only too true. He glared at Mei Mei for a moment, trying to think of something to say about her, but not being able to find anything that seemed just the right thing, he turned and ran towards his



aunt, who was calling them to come and help her hunt eggs.

The next day all the family started out for the graves of their ancestors. Each person carried something. The children brought

green willow branches, and bunches of ghost money. Their parents carried bowls of rice and meat and chicken and vegetables. It was not far to the family graveyard—there are no big cemeteries as in America and Europe—so they all walked, even Dee Dee.

The graves were pointed mounds of earth, lying in a pretty little grove of cypress trees. The food was all placed around the graves so that the spirits might find it if they wanted it; incense and ghost money were burnt, while all the family knelt down, and prayed to their forefathers.

The spirits of ancestors are very important, and old people are greatly honored. They do not mind getting old at all, and often, long before one dies, the family buys the coffin and gives it a place of honor in the house. These coffins are beautiful with shiny black and gold lacquer outside and soft satin cushions and fine carving inside. Of course the old person for whom it was bought is very pleased that his family think so much of him, and he is very proud to know that soon he will also be an honored ancestor.

The children did not take a great part, but they knew it was a most important ceremony for their parents. When the last prayer had been said, every one rose and walked back to the farm. Here a wonderful lunch awaited them—this time piping hot!

In the afternoon the children went for a walk in the hills. They picked armloads of flowers and ferns, just as American children do when they go for a stroll. Many of the plants and flowers were the same as those in your country, but there was one plant that is not known in America. That was speckled bamboo. It had a green stem and leaves, and these were flecked with pale yellowish-green. Ger Ger and Mei Mei had never seen it before, and took some to show to their mother. When Grandmother saw it she told them to sit down and rest while she told them the story of the Speckled Bamboo.



THE STORY OF THE SPECKLED BAMBOO

Many years ago, there lived an emperor whose name was Yao. He was very wise and clever, and did much to make himself and

his country famous. His palace and especially his gardens were very beautiful, and people came from far and near to see them. They covered many acres of ground, and there was a small army of gardeners to take care of them.

Among all these gardeners there was one young man named Shun. He had worked in the Emperor's gardens since he was a boy, and he had learnt a great deal from the Master Gardener. He knew each flower and plant; each tree and shrub. To him they seemed like children who had to be taught how to grow strong and healthy.

After a long life of usefulness, the Master Gardener died, and because he was so clever and honest, Shun was made Master Gardener in his place. Now he had to look after the great orchards and grain fields, as well as the flowers and shrubs. He had to see that the other gardeners did their work properly, and that the fruit and grain were not stolen. Shun worked honestly and well, and did not expect any reward except his pay. He did not know that the Emperor was watching him, and that His Majesty was well pleased.

The Emperor had two beautiful daughters, who were so much alike that no one could tell them apart. Shun had seen them walking in the gardens, and had fallen in love with them, but he could not make up his mind which he loved better. The Emperor's daughters had also seen Shun, and had fallen in love with him, but neither dared to tell His Majesty, because Shun was but a humble gardener.

One day, while the Emperor walked in the gardens he saw a very lovely lily floating on one of the ponds. It was a wonderful golden yellow color, and brighter and larger than any he had ever seen before. Then the Emperor called his Master Gardener to him.

"Shun," said the Emperor, "for a long time I have watched

you and seen that you were honest and trustworthy, so that now I wish to reward you. You may tell me what you would like best in the world, and if it is in my power to grant it, you shall have your wish."

Shun was amazed at his good fortune, but being but a gardener, although a Master Gardener, he dared not tell His Majesty of his longing to marry one of his daughters. He hesitated, and dared not speak, but the Emperor was just and kind and soon made Shun feel more at ease.

"Your Majesty, though I know my unworthiness, I have long loved your daughter, and my dearest wish is to marry her."

The monarch was greatly surprised, but nevertheless, called his daughters and bade Shun tell him which of the two lovely maidens he wanted for his bride. This was extremely difficult for the young man, as he did not know which of the two to choose. While he was hesitating, the matter was settled by the princesses themselves, who loved one another dearly, and could not bear to be parted from one another. Also, neither one could bear the thought of the other becoming the bride of Shun. They confessed to their father their love for the young man, and begged that both be allowed to marry him.

As it is permitted to have two wives in China, the Emperor gave his consent and made Shun a mandarin, which means nobleman, and allowed him to wear a red button on his cap. Only the Emperor and his family could wear a *yellow* button, but Shun was given the next rank and so he wore the red button.

The marriage of Shun and the princesses was carried out with great splendor and feasting, and the Emperor caused a palace to be built, where they lived with great happiness.

One day Shun fell ill. The greatest physicians came from all over the empire to cure him, but not one could do any good. Shun was by this time quite an old man, and he knew that he would soon

die. He called his wives to him and bade them farewell.

"Bury me in a bamboo grove, so that the wind may sing in the branches over my grave," he told them.

The next day Shun died, and his wives caused him to be buried in a very beautiful grove of bamboo, according to his wish. Here they went every day to weep, and their tears fell on the stems and leaves of the bamboo. When the sun had dried the salty tears, there were pale green stains where the tears had fallen, and to this day the speckled bamboo is called the Bamboo of Shun's Wives.

THE DRAGON-BOAT FESTIVAL

It was hot. It was blisteringly, smotheringly hot. The air danced in heat whirls, and there was not a breath of wind. There was no sound, except the never-ending z-z-z-z-z-ah, z-z-z-z-z-ah, z-z-z-z-z-ah of the cicadas in the trees of Wang Shen Sun's garden, and a gentle clacking sound that came from the river. It was made by the treadmill that pumped water from the river into the parched and thirsty fields. There had been no rain for weeks and the yellow dust lay ankle deep in the village street. That treadmill had been working for days. Ger Ger and Mei Mei, after watching the three hot and weary men stepping, stepping, stepping on the wooden pedals that caused the little scoops to go round and pump water from the river, thought themselves lucky to be able to stay in the big cool shop.

Early in the morning, when it was still cool, Mei Mei and Ger Ger had played shuttlecock, and Mei Mei had won, and Ger Ger was sulky. He wanted to win, but Mei Mei always seemed able to make that shuttlecock fall just where she wanted it!

Shuttlecock is a game that is played all over the world, but nowhere do children play it as they do in China. They make the shuttlecocks themselves out of cash and feathers. A cash is a small coin about as big as a penny, and it has a square hole in the middle. Three or four cash, a bit of string, and a bunch of feathers are enough, and by fastening the feathers in the hole of the cash, you have a very good shuttlecock in five minutes.

Mei Mei had started the game by tossing the shuttlecock into the air, and catching it on the side of her foot. She stood on her left foot, and swung her right foot inwards, and caught the flying feathers on the flat part just below the ankle. Mei Mei had had a great deal of practise and could play very well. She had missed when she had thirty-five points, and then Ger Ger had started. He made only twenty-seven points before he had to stop. Again Mei Mei took up the game and had successfully finished at one hundred



points. Then Ger Ger would not play any more, saying it was too hot anyway, so now they played quietly in the shop with bean soldiers.

"Oh, I do wish it would rain," sighed Mei Mei.

Ger Ger rose and walked to the door and looked out. Away to the south-east a great towering mass of cloud rose high into the hot

blue sky. Ger Ger went back and flung himself down on a big sack of rice.

"The cloud is there again. Perhaps it will rain today," said the little boy.

"Perhaps," was Mei Mei's answer.

That cloud had been seen every day for a week, but it never sent a single drop of rain to the thirsty earth. Late in the afternoon it would drift away, without fulfilling its promise, and leaving disappointment behind. The fields and the people suffered from the heat and hoped for rain. Neither Ger Ger nor Mei Mei wore much clothing, nor did any one else. The children wore a pair of thin cotton trousers and nothing else. It really was too hot!

"Oh, I wish it would rain!" said Mei Mei once more.

Her father heard her as he passed by.

"After today it will rain," he said. "This afternoon the dragons will see how much we need rain, when they fight together. Surely a battle of the dragons will cause showers to fall."

"Why?" asked Ger Ger.

"Today is the fifth day of the fifth moon, when all the dragons fight, and we must do honor to them. Dah. Fei is making dragon cakes which we will eat at noon, and afterwards we will take them to the river."

Ger Ger listened thoughtfully and nodded.

"Why did you hang up those pieces of paper? Are they for the dragons too?" he asked, pointing to some yellow slips hanging from the top of the door and window frames. They had pictures of a spider, a scorpion, a toad, a centipede, and a snake printed on them, and near each was hung a little bunch of leaves.

Mr. Chung shook his head.

"No," he said. "Those are the charms against the five deadly poisons of the summer. That is why you and Mei Mei are wearing the five magic colors. This is the first of the Nine Unpleasant Days.

The next eight days are going to be hotter and more unbearable than any other this year. It is always so. When they have passed, things will be better. But today is worst of all, and so you wear the five silken bands."

Ger Ger looked at his wrists. His mother had tied silken threads of red, blue, yellow, green, and black around them early in the morning. Mei Mei had the same colors tied around her braids. These would be taken off at noon and thrown into the fire. This was called burning Bad Luck.

Early that morning the children had gone to a marshy piece of land near the river, and had cut a large bunch of wild iris leaves. They had also gathered some artemisia, which some people call mugwort, in a nearby field. They had taken it home to their mother, who had tied the leaves into little bunches together with bulbs of garlic, and had hung them at all the doors and windows. She believed that these leaves with their pungent scent would keep away the spirits of the summer diseases. Mrs. Chung feared these summer diseases very much, but she did not know that the flies that buzzed through her kitchen brought dysentery and cholera. The water that stood in a great earthen jar was not pure. She did not get her water from a big city reservoir where it is made crystal clear before it goes into the pipes that lead to kitchens in America. Mrs. Chung's water was brought in from the river, and set aside until all the dirt had sunk to the bottom. Of course no one drank this water. The Chung family only drank weak tea after the water had been boiled, which made it safe, but the dishes were washed in unboiled water, because no one thought about that. You can see what a hard time Mrs. Chung had to keep her family healthy.

Dah Fei had spent the morning in the kitchen, making dragon cakes. They were made of rice and in the center of each there was something especially good in the shape of candied fruit. They were

wrapped in wild iris leaves, triangle-shaped, and cooked. There were great piles of them, and in every house throughout China these cakes were eaten that day.

Ger Ger walked over to the shop entrance once more, and looked outside. The great cloud still hung in the sky. It was dazzlingly white, and very lovely, but it did not seem to come any nearer.

"Oof! it's hot," said the little boy, fanning his face with a bright paper fan. "I don't want to play any more. I just want to sit still. It's nearly lunch time, and I'm not even hungry!"

Dah Fei, coming from the hot kitchen for a breath of air, heard his remark.

"I don't suppose you will want any dragon cakes then," she said. "Mei Mei can have your share."

"Oh, I want some. I'm quite hungry after all!" cried the boy. Mei Mei laughed.

"I did not think he would like to miss the dragon cakes," she chuckled.

They left the shop, and Mrs. Chung removed the five-colored silken threads and threw them into the fire. Then every one trooped into the dining room, where the dragon cakes were piled into steaming heaps. In spite of not being hungry Ger Ger managed to eat nine.

In the afternoon the whole family went to the river bank, taking with them a basketful of the cakes. On the river they saw two long narrow boats, each with about twenty rowers, while five or six men beat drums and gongs. The prow of each boat was decorated with a large dragon's head. These boats were supposed to represent the dragons who were to battle together in the sky.

The two boats rowed up and down for a while, with banners waving, to show themselves to the people on the bank. Suddenly

there was an extra long roll of the drums, an extra loud crash of the gongs, a shout and a splash as the oars dipped, and they rowed towards one another as fast as they could. The boats met with a thud, and the battle began. They pushed and pulled and struggled, until one of the boats tipped over and every one fell into the water. The winners shouted and waved their banners and made a tremendous noise. The people on the bank applauded and Ger Ger was so excited that he almost fell into the water also. Then the dragon cakes were thrown into the water, and presently every one went home. Ger Ger looked back regretfully at so many good cakes floating down the river. It did seem a pity to leave them behind!

"Why did you throw the cakes into the river?" he asked.

"It is a very old custom," answered his mother.

"But why did they do it the first time?" Ger Ger persisted.

"There was once a very good, honest, and clever man . . . " began his mother, but she did not get any further for a moment because Mei Mei came to listen also. She did not know this story. Then Mrs. Chung went on:

"This wise and clever man lived at the Emperor's court, and found that there were many wicked people there beside himself. They stole from the state and their ruler, and the councilors told the Emperor many things that were not true. The wise man told the Emperor, but he would not listen to him, and banished him from the court. This grieved the good man so much, and he was so unhappy that he jumped into a lake and drowned himself.

"Some fishermen saw him sink, and hurried out to try and save him, but it was too late. The people had all loved the man, and every year after his death they would throw rice on the water of the lake, so that his spirit might be fed. This went on for a great many years, until one day his spirit came to them and told them not to throw rice in the lake any more.

" "There is a great dragon at the bottom of the lake, who eats all

the rice,' the spirit told them. 'But if you make cakes shaped like triangles, and tie them in iris leaves, the dragon will not touch them.'

"Since then the people have always tied the cakes as the spirit told them, and it lies well fed and at rest," said Mrs. Chung, ending her tale.

PUNISHING THE RAIN GOD

It was as hot as ever. There had been no rain after the Dragon Festival. A great many firecrackers had been shot off in order to remind the dragons and the gods that the country still needed rain, but it had been of no avail. The sun blazed down on the parched fields, and all the little creeks and small rivers had dried up. Only the mighty Yangtse was undisturbed, and flowed on the same as ever. Every day the people watched the sky for a welcome rain cloud, but it remained blue, blue, blue.

Ger Ger and Mei Mei did not know what to do. They did not want to play, and yet, to do nothing only made them feel hotter. It was Ger Ger's seventh birthday, and really an important day for him, but he did not care very much; it was too hot. A barber had been invited to come and shave off the little boy's topknot. That meant that he was no longer a baby, but a big boy ready to go to school.

Ger Ger was called into the shady courtyard, and Mei Mei followed. The barber had arrived. Barbers do not have shops as they do in Europe or America, but go from one place to another, and whoever needs him asks him to come to his house. The children found a little wooden stand with a basin of hot water all ready prepared. The barber wrapped a towel around Ger Ger's neck and invited him to seat himself on a high stool, while the rest of the family stood watching with smiling faces. Ger Ger felt very important because now he would be a really big boy. You would think it funny perhaps that it depended upon a haircut whether or not you could go to school, but for the Chung family it was a very special occasion. All the time the barber

was at work, he kept up a steady stream of talk.

"Lung Wang, the dragon king, has gone to his palace under



the sea," he told the children. "There it is cool, and he does not know how dry the earth is. The priests have said that this afternoon the image of Lung Wang must be taken out into the fields, and shown how badly the crops need rain. Then, if there is still no rain, he will be punished. If *that* does not help, the farmers are going to burn the temples."

Ger Ger's father nodded his head.

"Yes, indeed. It is a very bad year, and if there is no rain soon, the crops will be ruined, and there will be a famine."

"What's a famine?" demanded Ger Ger.

"A famine is a terrible thing. It means that there is no food

Lung Wang is pronounced Loong Wahng.

and many people will die of hunger. Rich people can go away and live somewhere else, but the less fortunate ones and the farmers must stay behind and starve," explained Mr. Chung.

"Are we going to have famine?" the little boy asked with a frightened face.

"If we get rain in time to save the harvest, everything will be all right, but it must come soon."

"There is going to be a big procession this afternoon," said the barber. "Every one will be there, and it will show the dragons how important it is. Of course, Mr. Chung, you will be going, because your trade depends upon the harvest."

"That is true; very true. We will all go," was the answer.

By this time the barber had finished his work, and put away his scissors and gleaming razor. The little basin was emptied, the wooden stand folded up, and everything slung on the barber's back. He smiled at Ger Ger, who was rubbing his smoothly shaven head. It felt strange without the little lock of hair that had adorned it for his whole life!

"The procession starts at three o'clock," said the barber, after he had been paid and was leaving. "I hope we will see one another again."

With that he pushed his burden higher on his shoulder, and with a polite bow and a cheery nod to Ger Ger, went his way.

That afternoon the children heard a great beating of gongs and popping of firecrackers. The people of the village were going to the temple to get the image of the Rain God. Mei Mei and Ger Ger hurried after their father when he went out to join the crowd as they passed in the street. At the head of the line there were two men beating gongs as hard as they could to warn the Rain God that they were coming. Then they took the image out into the country, and made long speeches to it, so that

the god might understand how much the farmers needed rain.

When this was over the image was taken back and placed in the temple again. At each doorway the people placed large jars of water with willow twigs in them, because willow is supposed to be a rain tree. Across the village street long ropes were hung, with rain prayers tied to them. Incense sticks were burnt while the people waited.

The next day there was still no cloud in the sky, so once again the Rain God's image was taken out into the fields. This time it was not brought back, but left in a very sunny spot, so that it might feel just as hot and uncomfortable as the thirsty fields! Then the people all went home, hoping that now the Rain God would be sensible, and send rain.

All through the hot day the poor image stood in the burning sun. Its bright paint blistered and peeled. If it had been alive it would have been most unhappy. Perhaps it was anyway, who knows? Strangely enough, towards evening a little fresh wind sprang up. It became somewhat cooler and every one went to the riverside to enjoy the pleasant breeze. Far away, just over the horizon, a small white tip of cloud was to be seen.

Gradually it became bigger, and as the sun set, it turned a lovely pink color. It grew larger, the pink became rose, and then golden. The sun dipped behind the distant hills, and the cloud became soft gray. The people were so happy that they let popping crackers show their joy. The rain was coming! The rain was coming!

Late that night, after he had been asleep a long time, Ger Ger woke and heard a soft rushing sound. At first he could not make out what it was. He lay still and listened, and then he heard the steady drip, drip, drip from the roof. The rain had come! Ger Ger turned over and went to sleep again very happily. There would be no famine!

DANGER THREATENS

The rain had come to stay. Where before there had been too much sunshine, there was now too much rain. It rained and rained steadily, for days on end. Whenever the children looked out of doors there was a shimmering gray curtain of water that almost hid the other side of the road. Not only in the neighborhood of San Cha Tse did it rain, but all up and down the broad Yangtse valley the dark clouds hung low and poured their loads of water onto the earth. The creeks filled and swelled the rivers; the waters of the great Yangtse flowed swifter, and rose higher day by day.

The thirsty fields had had their drink of water, but now it really looked as if they might get too much. Every day the men of the village went to the river bank to see if the water had risen, and each time they came back to say that it was higher. It went on raining. Every morning the market-place looked as though it had a roof made of brown paper umbrellas while the people made their purchases.

Mei Mei and Ger Ger were very tired indeed of staying indoors. One afternoon Mei Mei watched her father pull on his yellow, hob-nailed rain shoes, and take down the brown oiled paper umbrella that hung from the ceiling to dry. He was going to the river bank with some of the other men of the village to discuss the danger of a flood.

"Please let me come too?" she begged. "I'm so tired of staying home all the time."

"All right," was the answer.

"I want to come too!" shouted Ger Ger.

His father nodded his consent.

There was a scramble for rain shoes and another umbrella, and in less time than it takes to tell, the two children were ready to go. Out of doors the rain clattered loudly on the strong brown paper above them like low thunder. Gleeefully they splashed through the mud, although their mother had warned them not to step in the puddles. Her last words had been, "Now don't get your feet wet, and stay in the dry part of the road."



(I wonder in how many languages, and how many mothers say exactly those same words every day!)

Naughty Mei Mei and Ger Ger forgot them as soon as they

had left the house, in spite of their dutifully polite, "Yes, Mother." Mr. Chung did not notice them. He was talking earnestly with his neighbor the tailor, and the children walked behind them, giggling softly at each splash. The mud was the lovely soft kind that *squooshed* at every step. It was great fun.

When they arrived at the river bank they found some more villagers standing there, gravely regarding the ever-rising river. For a while they stood talking earnestly together, and made up their minds that something had to be done to prevent a flood. It was decided that all the men and bigger boys should get to work and fill sacks with earth in order to make a dam along the river and all around the village.

Mr. Chung promised to supply as many empty sacks as he could, while the others agreed to get as many as they could also. If the river kept rising another week they would all have to leave their homes behind, and escape to another part of the country until the flood was over. Mei Mei and Ger Ger listened to the soberly talking men, and understood that it was most important that a flood be prevented. It made them unhappy to think they might have to leave the village, and on their way home they even forgot to walk in the puddles.

Three days later, the children went to the river again with their father. All along the bank was a low wall of tightly filled bags of earth. It had not rained all during that day, but the clouds still hung low, and the river was still rising. Around the village, and along the little creek that flowed through one end of the town dams had been built also. It was all that the people could do, and now they could only wait and hope that it would not be necessary to leave their homes.

In the temple incense was burnt and prayers were said to beg the gods to keep the river from overflowing. Mr. Chung had written to his father that he and his family would come to stay

with him if there was a flood. Mrs. Chung had already started a few preparations in case she would not have time at the last moment.

Three more days passed. The rain clouds had all drifted away, the sky was clear, and the sun overhead was burning almost as fiercely as it had a month before. With great anxiety the people waited. A constant watch was kept, and every hour the rise of the water was measured. The men of the village all took turns at this post, and did their task most carefully, because a flood meant disaster.

Right after breakfast Ger Ger had gone to the river side. He did not mind the heat, and stayed with the watchman all morning. At noon he went home and told his parents that there had been no more rise since six o'clock that morning. Every one was glad to hear it.

"If by tomorrow the water has risen no more," said Mr. Chung, "the village will be safe, and we will not be forced to leave, and the harvest will be saved also."

All day the villagers remained at the river side. Incense was burnt, and gongs and drums were beaten. By evening the water was at the same mark as it had been in the morning. The next day every one hurried to the river once more. To their joy the water had dropped. They were saved! There would be no need to leave San Cha Tse and go among strange people and to strange places. That day was spent in feasting and happiness, with fire crackers banging and popping all over the village. Every one was happy, but Ger Ger was happiest of all.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

The days were getting shorter. The sun shone deeper yellow than it had done in the middle of the summer. The far-stretching rice fields rolled away to the horizon like a golden-brown sea. Grasshoppers and crickets chirped and whirred in the warm sunshine



as though they were having an extra good time before the cold weather came. In almost every house and shop one of these little singers was to be found. The people liked the cheerful song of the "Little Golden Bells" at harvest time.



AN EMBROIDERY PATTERN FOR DEE DEE'S SHOES

Only a few days before a pedlar had come by selling them. Mei Mei had bought one in a tiny cage of bamboo. It hung in the shop all day, and in the evening it was taken into the dining-room. The little cricket chirped away as noisily as if it were still in the fields. It was at this time of the year that the women and girls of the family brought out their sewing, and started making ready for the winter. Dah Fei was sewing on her wedding dress. Mrs. Chung was making warm, padded coats for the children, and Mei Mei was embroidering slippers for Dee Dee.

The day that the cricket had been bought, Mrs. Chung had given Mei Mei a lovely piece of deep blue satin, and had showed the little girl how to cut out slippers for Dee Dee.

"Go to the silk shop and buy a paper pattern, and some embroidery silk," she told her.

Mei Mei was very pleased to go to the shop by herself to get these things. She had often gone with her mother and Dah Fei, but never alone. However she knew just what to do. First she paid a visit to the pattern-cutter, who was an old woman with a wrinkled face and gray hair. Mei Mei told her what she wanted and the old lady set to work with a pair of sharply gleaming scissors and a piece of soft white paper. Snip, snip, snip, went the sharp scissor points, turning to and fro and in and out. The little girl watched a lovely spray of flowers and leaves with a butterfly hovering over them, quickly take shape. It was as dainty and delicate as paper lace, and Mei Mei was a very happy little girl when she went to choose her silks. She would paste her paper pattern on her satin, and then stitch carefully over it. She bought some rose and yellow silk for the flowers, two shades of green for the leaves, and some pale lavender and deep golden yellow for the butterfly.

That evening as she sat working on the little shoes, Ger Ger and Dah Fei busily folded little slips of silver paper into ghost money for the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts. It fell on the fifteenth

of the month, and as it was one of the most important festivals of the year, it needed a lot of preparation.

On that day the spirits of all the people who have died are thought to come back to earth, to see how their families are behaving. The poor ghosts who have no families are also welcomed by every one else, so that no one in the spirit world need feel lonely, or go hungry on that day.

On the day of the festival, Mr. Chung hung a line of little paper suits and dresses across the doorway, so that the spirits might be



provided with new clothes. All day the priests chanted prayers in the temple and a blue haze of incense hung over the market-place. In front of each house in the village stood a table that was arranged to look like a small altar. A pair of tall candles flanked a bowl of fine ashes in which incense sticks had been placed upright. In front of these stood bowls of all kinds of good things for the hungry ghosts that might pass that way.

In the evening the candles were lighted, little sticks of incense sent up slender spirals of fragrant smoke, and great bunches of ghost money were burnt. Mei Mei and Ger Ger stood before the altar table with the rest of the family, and made their bows to the spirits of the dead. Even little Dee Dee was bent over as far as his fat little body would go. He did not like it at all, but his mother

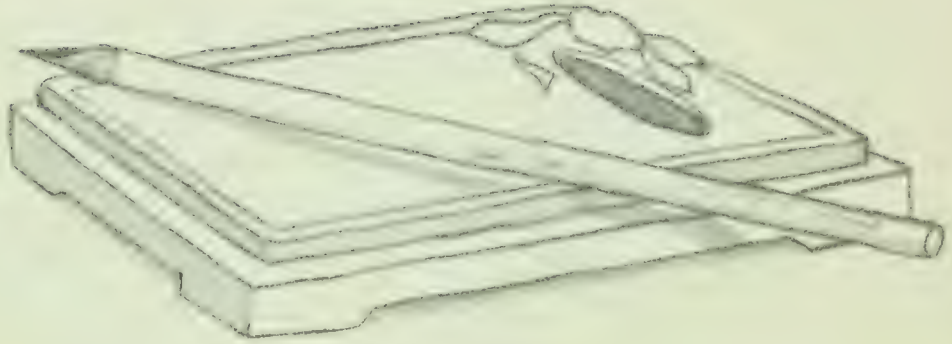


"IT WAS A PRETTY SIGHT"

made him make his bows anyway. The spirits might be angry if he did not.

When this had been done, each member of the family took a flat, square piece of wood, to which a lantern with a candle in it had been fastened. These they took to the river bank, and when the candles had been lighted, they were set afloat. All along the river the fairy lights drifted to show the spirits of those who had been drowned that they also had not been forgotten. It was a pretty sight, and the people stood watching them until they floated around a bend in the river. That night there were no boats or fishermen on the river. It is not good to be on the river when the Lamps of the Dead float on the water.

When all the fairy lamps were out of sight the people turned back toward the village. It was already late for the children. School re-opened tomorrow, and Ger Ger was going for the first time. Mei Mei had been before, so she knew all about it, but Ger Ger was very much excited. Was he not a big boy? Hadn't his topknot been shaved off?



GER GER GOES TO SCHOOL

Early the next morning Ger Ger woke with the feeling that something special was going to happen. For a moment he lay thinking, and then suddenly remembered . . . He was going to school! He jumped out of bed and hurriedly dressed himself. His cheeks shone from the scrubbing he gave them, and his little black eyes sparkled with excitement. The long blue cotton school-coat lay all ready for him, and he felt very proud as he pulled it on and popped the little buttons into their loops under his chin.

He was ready long before Mei Mei, and he could not understand why she took such a long time about everything. He was sure that they would be late for school, and all the time Mei Mei was having her breakfast he kept running to the street door to make sure the school bell had not rung.

"Why do you keep running back and forth?" asked Mei Mei.

"You are so slow. I'm sure we will not be on time. There are no more children on the road, and we will be punished if we are too late," was the little boy's answer.

"We have plenty of time; don't worry," his sister said, and quietly went on eating.

At last Mei Mei was finished. Ger Ger was hopping on one foot with impatience to be off. The boy had a brand new school bag, made of brown canvas and bound with leather, slung over his shoulder. There was nothing at all inside it, but Ger Ger had seen other boys carrying school bags, so of course he had to have one too.

As they left home, Ling Shiou, the tailor's little daughter, came out of her house too. She was just as old as Ger Ger, and was also going to school for the first time. She hurried to catch up with Ger Ger and Mei Mei because she was a little frightened. The children all knew the village schoolmaster, but the little ones had never spoken to him.

Hand in hand Ling Shiou and Ger Ger followed Mei Mei into the schoolroom to the master's desk. He was a tall young man in a long gray coat, and wearing a pair of big black-rimmed spectacles. He welcomed the two new pupils kindly, and smiled a great big friendly smile when he saw that they were a little frightened.

There was still time to play until the bell rang, so he sent them out of doors again, promising to show them everything later. In the playground there were many other children, and although Ger Ger knew them all, here at school everything seemed different, and they were almost strangers.

Presently the bell rang, and every one stood in a line, Ger Ger and Ling Shiou being the last two. At a word from the master they all filed in and took their places. Only Ling Shiou and Ger Ger had no seat, and so, because they were the only two new pupils, they were allowed to sit together at a little table. The master gave them each a small book of very thin paper, a card with a word sign printed on it, and an ink-brush set.

You have seen Chinese writing, haven't you? Well, each sign means a whole word, and is called a character. There are easy words,

and hard words, just as in English. The characters the schoolmaster gave Ger Ger and his little friend were very easy. He showed them how to slip the printed card between the pages of the little book so that it would show through the thin paper. After that he showed them how to make ink.

In China ink does not come in bottles, but in little hard black tablets about two inches long and one inch wide. You must have a flat piece of stone and put a few drops of water on it. Then rub the little ink tablet in the water, and just enough of it will melt for you to use. It really is rather like your paint boxes. Of course both Ling Shiou and Ger Ger had seen this done many times, so they knew just what to do. Instead of pens they used brushes with very fine points. The master taught them how to hold these brushes, and showed them how to trace the word sign on the pages of their books, doing it over and over again until they could write it without tracing.

While they were doing this, all the other children were learning their lessons, and studying as hard as they could. They did not do this as you do, quietly, so as not to disturb anyone else, but out loud at the top of their voices! Each one repeated his lesson over and over, not listening to any one else at all. In an American or European school, the harder every one studies, the quieter it is. In China, the harder they study, the more noise they make! Still it is quite easy to learn something that way, particularly when you have something to memorize. Try it some day, when you are alone.

Ger Ger and Ling Shiou worked very hard, and soon were able to write their first characters. Then they were given others. After a while the bell rang, and every one went out into the playground. Here the master took off his long gray coat. The children stood in rows, and he taught them exercises, just as you are taught by your "gym" teachers.

The two youngest children thought it great fun, and went on

doing exercises long after all the others had stopped. After recess they had some singing and then went on with their writing. Ger Ger decided that he liked school, and was sorry to go home at lunch time.

"I like school, and so does Ling Shiou," he told his father. "This morning we learnt to write, and this afternoon the master is teaching us how to count. In a little while I can take over the shop, and you can go on a holiday."

"You will have to go to school a good many years, before you can do that," said his father laughingly.

That afternoon the teacher taught his two new pupils to count with the help of an abacus. This is a square wooden frame with slender bars across it. On the bars are big wooden beads that can be pushed to and fro. Almost every one in China uses them when any number work has to be done.

During the last half hour of school there were no lessons. Instead, the master told the class a story, and because it is a very old and well-loved tale, I will tell it here.

HOW THE RABBIT TAUGHT THE LION A LESSON

A long time ago, a lion lived on the side of a mountain. He was very big and strong and proud, and because he was stronger than any one else, he made all the animals do as he told them to do. At times he was quite cruel if they did not obey him. Each morning after the sun rose, the animals had to come and bow down to him, and greet him as their king. If they did not do this, he was very angry. They did not enjoy doing this, but were frightened to stay away. One day several of the animals met to talk it over.

"I am not going to do it any more," said a rabbit, who was braver than the rest.

"But then you will be punished. The lion says that he is our king, and we must obey him," the others told him.

"Never mind, I'm going to try," was the rabbit's defiant answer.

The next morning the rabbit was lying in a nice soft nest of dried grass. Nearby was a lovely bed of lush green clover which he wanted for his breakfast. He did not know where to find the lion, and did not feel like hunting all over the mountain for him. Besides, what was the use of it, anyway? He was munching the tender clover leaves, and enjoying himself very much, when suddenly, the lion stood before him!

"You little rascal!" cried the big beast. "What do you mean by staying here and eating clover, when you should have come and made your bow to me? All the other animals came. How dare you stay away?"

For a moment the rabbit was frightened, but he refused to

be bullied by the lion just because he was bigger and stronger. He wondered how he could trick the lion, and so he pretended to be speechless with fright, while he thought hard. After a moment he had an idea.

"This morning I started out to find you," he said, bowing deeply, "but I could not come all the way."

"Why not?" demanded the lion.

"When I came to the river, an enormous ogre with a lion's head was sitting on the river bank, and he would not let me pass; so I came here to wait until he was gone. Didn't you see him as you came?"

"No, I did not. Did he harm you?"

"No, he didn't hurt me at all, but he shouted at me, and I was very frightened. He said, 'Where are you going, Long Ears?' and I told him I was going to make my bow to the lion who is King of all the animals. 'That lion isn't King of beasts! Why, I am much stronger. Tell the lion I will fight him to prove it!'"

"Show me where this ogre is, and I will teach him to stop you from doing your duty," commanded the lion with a growl.

While the lion and the rabbit had been talking, all the other animals had come close to see what would happen. They were afraid that the lion would eat the disobedient rabbit, and were very much surprised when they saw the two walk toward the river. They all followed at a distance to watch.

"Where is that ogre?" demanded the lion.

"The ogre lives right in the middle, Your Majesty, and I'm sure that he is at home," said the rabbit meekly.

The lion looked into the clear water and saw himself as in a mirror. He thought it was the ogre, and with a loud roar, he jumped . . . **SPLASH** . . . into the river. He floundered about, but he could not find the ogre. Finally he gave up, and came dripping to the side of the stream. All the animals had seen him

jump into the river, and knew how the rabbit had tricked him. They all laughed very hard as he came out of the water.

The lion gave himself an angry shake, sending a shower of gleaming drops in all directions, but he did not say anything. He was a little ashamed of himself, and decided that it was not at all clever to call himself King, just because he was bigger and stronger than the other animals. A little, weak rabbit had made him look very foolish.

From that day the lion never made the animals come and bow to him any more. He showed them that he could be kind as well as cruel, and that he was willing to use his great strength to help them when necessary. In a short time the animal people made him King once more, not because they feared him, but because they liked him and honored him. Then he was King indeed!



THE LADY HENG-O AND THE RABBIT OF WHITE JADE

THE HARVEST MOON FESTIVAL

"Upon the moon there is a wonderful palace, made of crystal and white jade. It stands in the midst of lovely gardens of white flowers, and wide-spreading trees. Snow white birds fly about and make sweet music for Heng-O, the pretty moon lady, who decides happy marriages upon Earth. Wherever the moon lady goes, she is followed by the Rabbit of White Jade, who is her messenger, and who lives under a giant cassia tree.

"The Rabbit of White Jade was once alive, and lived in a pretty grove of trees in a forest. He was very clever and wise, and because he was good, he was happy. He taught all the other small creatures of the forest to worship the gods, and to live good lives.

"One day, a holy man came into the grove in the forest. He was tired and hungry, and had lost his way. He begged the little forest-folk to help him. One and all brought him the best they had to offer. The otters brought fish; the foxes brought pheasants; the squirrels nuts and roots. Only the rabbit came empty-handed.

" 'Master' said the rabbit, 'I eat only grass and leaves, so I can bring you nothing.'

"As he spoke, he stepped near a small charcoal fire the holy man had built. All the other animals stood by watching with wondering eyes. They did not understand the rabbit at all, because usually he was the first to help any one needing aid.

" 'I have only myself to offer,' he said, and before any one could stop him, he jumped into the fire and gave his little body for food for the holy man.

"The holy man was so grateful, that he sent the spirit of the

rabbit to the moon to live with Heng-O. She made the rabbit her messenger because he was so clever and swift of foot.

"And so," said Dah Fei to the listening children, "we have the image of the Rabbit of White Jade on our altar tables tonight, so that he will take our prayers to Heng-O."

When at harvest time the full moon sails high above the tree-tops, candles twinkle in the courtyards, and sticks of incense dwindle away into tiny spirals of musk-scented smoke, it is the time when the Chinese people worship the moon and the harvest gods. The women pray to Heng-O to bless their homes and families, and the maidens ask her to send them good husbands. Before the little altar tables the people thank the gods for the rich harvest.

On each altar table stand five plates with sweet, spicy moon cakes, peaches, grapes, melons, and sweet potatoes. A little clay image of the moon rabbit stands between two tall candles, with a dish of fresh bean-sprouts before it. Bean-sprouts are the rabbit's favorite food and because he is Heng-O's messenger, he is very important, and must be well treated.

When every one has made his bows, the little image of the jade rabbit is burnt so that he can return to the moon and tell Heng-O of the prayers of the women and the maidens. The last candle flickers, the scent of burning musk floats away, the moon cakes are eaten, and the fun begins.

This festival is very much like a country fair, with sweet shops, and fortune-tellers, and toy stalls. In San Cha Tse, it was a particularly happy time, because it lay in the middle of a wide-spread farming district. All the farmers came to the village to look at, and buy pretty things. It was a holiday, and the street was crowded with people with smiling faces. Torches and oil lamps shone in the still, cool air, and merry voices were heard on all sides.

Ger Ger and Mei Mei had money in their pockets. They visited the toy shop and saw such delightful things! There were

tops, and balls, and marbles and wonderful kites. There were little butterflies that could roll along on wheels, flapping their wings with a tinkly sound. There were green and red lions with sweet smiles and furry ears, and brown camels with fluffy humps.

"Oh, what shall I buy?" asked Ger Ger in perplexity. "I want a top, but I want a kite too."

"The old top can still spin," said Mei Mei. "If you take it to the carpenter's shop, perhaps he will cut a new point for you."

Ger Ger hesitated. It *was* difficult. Mei Mei bought a doll. Little girls in China do not have dolls often, and Mei Mei had wished for one a long time. This one could be undressed also, so she was very happy. Dee Dee was the proud owner of a shiny red ball. While they were still there, Ling Shiou came along and stopped to see what the others were buying. She had bought a tinkly butterfly with gaudy wings.

"Well, Ger Ger, what are you going to get?" asked Mei Mei.

For another instant he hesitated, and then chose the kite. It was almost as tall as the little boy himself, and shaped like a dragon-fly.

"It is a beauty," said Ling Shiou. "Have you seen its eyes, Ger Ger? They move."

"Yes, I know. And kite flying starts in two weeks, so I'll put it away and have the finest kite of all bye and bye."

It was already late for them to be out, but it was a special occasion. High above them the moon shone like brightly polished silver. As they walked along Ger Ger grumbled a little that he had not been able to buy both the top and the kite.

"What do you suppose the moon rabbit's spirit will think of you when it hears you?" demanded Mei Mei. "Just remember how unselfish he was, and see if you dare to grumble again."

Ger Ger did not say anything more. He had the grace to be ashamed of himself. After all he did have a beautiful kite.

THE LEGEND OF THE KITE

Outside the village, in the open fields covered with rice-stubble, the children were flying their kites. Ger Ger's wonderful dragon-fly rose high in the air next to a great gray hawk. Away to the left a huge green and yellow butterfly fluttered its gaudy wings. A strong wind blew, the sun shone. It was the ninth day of the ninth moon—the day when almost every boy in China flies a kite.

After the harvest moon festival Ger Ger had hung his dragon-fly on a high nail out of harm's way. Many a time he had looked at it, and wished that the kite-flying season would begin, but he had let it hang so that it would be quite unspoiled when the time came to send it into the air.

"Why does every one have kites now?" Ger Ger had asked his father.

"I really don't know. I never thought about it," said Mr. Chung. "Perhaps Dah Fei can tell you."

But Dah Fei did not know. It was only when he asked his mother, that Ger Ger's question was answered.

"In my part of the country they fly kites both in spring and autumn. Why it is done in spring, I can't tell you, except that there is a great deal of wind. In autumn the boys fly kites to remember the good man, Huang Ching."

"What did he do?" asked the little boy.

"If you will help me shell these beans, I will tell you while we work."

Ger Ger was quite willing to help and sat down on a tiny bamboo stool with a bowl full of beans in his lap.

"In the ninth dynasty," began Mrs. Chung, "there lived a man called Huang Ching. He was very wise and good and kind, and no one ever asked his help in vain. He owned a great deal of land, and droves of sheep and ponies and herds of cattle.

"The other people living in that part of the country were very wicked and cruel. They were dishonest and cheated one another whenever they could. They forgot to worship the gods, and neglected the temples shamefully. Some of them had even joined the robber-bands who lived in the hills.

"One day Huang Ching was sitting under a willow tree near his house. It was warm weather, and he was very tired. He had ridden all over his lands that morning, and now found the cool shade very pleasant. Whether or not he slept, he could never say afterwards, but suddenly an old man with a gray beard stood before him.

" 'Huang Ching,' said the graybeard, 'you must take all your family and friends away from here at once, and go to the highest place you can find. A great disaster threatens this valley, because the gods are angry with the wickedness of the people. If you go at once, you can save yourself and your family. Do not delay.'

"With these words the old man disappeared, and although Huang Ching jumped from his seat and hunted everywhere, he was nowhere to be found. Huang Ching at once warned his family to make ready to leave the valley, and then hurried to tell his friends and neighbors, but they only laughed.

" 'You are a dreamer, and as easily frightened as a baby,' they said to him. And no matter how he urged and pleaded, they did not listen.

"Huang Ching returned home. His family was all ready for the journey. Two horses were laden with clothes and provisions, and they set out at once. They traveled for many days to the highest mountain in the region and camped near the summit, close to a

Huang Ching is pronounced Hooahng Ching.

temple. They burnt incense to the gods and prayed for protection, and then proceeded to look for a place to live. Luckily they found an abandoned wood-cutter's hut, and they decided to remain there until they could go back to their old home.

"In this lonely place they lived for three moons and in all that time they saw no other living creature. They did not know what was going on down in the valley below. One night the good Huang Ching once more saw the old man in a dream. This time he was told to return home as the danger was past.

"The next day Huang Ching's stalwart sons once more loaded the pack horses, and the long journey started. When they arrived in the valley, they found all their friends dead, their droves of cattle and horses and sheep scattered and lost. Everywhere the fields were bare and lonely. The great river had overflowed its banks, flooding the farms and drowning the people. There was nothing left. Only Huang Ching and his family were saved.

"Huang Ching was very sorry that all his friends were gone, but he and his sons decided that they must be grateful that they had been spared. They built a temple in honor of the gods who had sent their messenger to warn them of their danger. Every year after that, although they themselves did not leave home, they kept the memory green of their trip, by sending up kites 'to a high place,' and now it has become the custom to do this all over China."

Ger Ger shook out the last bean shells as his mother finished her story. He liked it very much, and made up his mind to pretend that he was Huang Ching when he flew his dragonfly.

ACTORS COME TO TOWN

DONG! ge-dong, dong, dong, DONG! CLANG! CLANG!
DONG! ge-dong, dong, dong, DONG! CLANG! CLANG!

Down the village street came a long file of men and boys, dressed in gaily colored clothes. At their head was a small band of gongs and cymbals, drums and flutes, playing a shrill tune. After them strutted a lion . . . but such a lion as you have never seen! He was made of blue cloth with a big cardboard head. His mane and the tip of his tail were made of unraveled rope. He had a gentle smile and had never, never done any one any harm! Inside the blue cotton skin two men formed his body and legs, and they made him prance and leap and play tricks as no true lion ever dreamed of doing.

In China itself there are no lions, but the people have heard about them. Although it is not well-known, in India and Thibet, which lies next door to China, there *are* lions, and very big ones, too. They differ a little from the African lions just as African and Indian elephants differ. So you see, while the Chinese people have never seen lions, they have heard stories about them, and so a funny fairy monster like the one in the picture is what the Chinese children call a lion.

The sound of the gongs very soon called every one out of doors to see the fun. Of course Ger Ger and Mei Mei were among the first, for it was not often that strolling players and acrobats came to the village.

"There are ever so many of them!" cried Mei Mei.

"Yes," said her father, "usually there are only lion-men or

stilt-walkers alone, but they have come together today. There are also actors. See that man with the long hair and woman's dress? Perhaps they will give a performance tonight in the pagoda square."

"May we see it too?" begged Ger Ger.

"Yes, I think so," was the answer.



The children danced up and down with joy. The parade went on through the dusty street to the temple yard, as Mr. Chung had thought. There they stopped to rest because they had come a long way and most of them were tired. The children had followed them and now stood by, watching. The lion was the most interesting of all. Presently one of the men removed the big cardboard head and put it on the ground. It was so funny to see the man's face where the big lion's head had been a moment before that Ger Ger laughed out loud. The man smiled back and stepped out of the blue legs. The other half of the lion now came off and another man appeared.

"When does the performance start?" asked Mei Mei.

"At six o'clock the lion will start to juggle with that big ball over there," answered the man. "Then the stilt walkers will sing and dance, and at seven there will be a play. Come back then, and you will see a fine show."

As it was nearly supper time, the children went home, with a great deal to tell their parents and Dah Fei. They were in a hurry to get back to the temple yard, and Ger Ger gobbled his dinner until his mother stopped him.



"Ger Ger, you shall stay at home alone if you do not behave yourself. And finish your bowl of rice. You must, or you will have a pockmarked wife when you grow up."

"Why shall I?" demanded the little boy.

"When there is a famine, every grain of rice is precious. It is

wicked to waste it, and those who do are punished," said Mrs. Chung.

"But there is no famine now."

"No, that is true, but there may be one some day, and then you will know how important each grain of rice can be."

Ger Ger did not say anything more, but obediently ate every little grain in his bowl.

When supper was over, the whole family went down to the temple. The fun was just starting, and the lion was capering and leaping about after the big ball. It was tossed high in the air and caught again. The two men who formed the lion's body were so clever and worked together so well, that it sometimes seemed as if it were a real animal.

A little further on was a group of men dressed in gaudy colors. All the parts for girls or women were taken by men and boys. These had been treated like girls from early childhood so that they could make their parts seem more real, because there are no actresses on the stage in China. Even their voices had been trained to a high pitched tone. They danced about on stilts strapped to their legs, and waved their arms in the long-sleeved gowns as they moved, and sang in shrill tones. The Chung family stopped to watch them for a moment, but as the grown-ups were eager to see the play, they moved on. A low stage had been erected near the temple wall, but there was no scenery at all. There never is in Chinese plays.

"I wonder what play we are going to see," said Mrs. Chung to her husband.

"I hope one of the good historical plays. I hear that the old-fashioned poems are not so much liked any more, and modern stuff that no one knows is being used instead," answered Mr. Chung disapprovingly.

That is something very curious about most Chinese plays. They are all made up of long poems which every one learns at school,

and if one of the actors should make a mistake, you can be sure that half-a-dozen voices from the audience will correct him. The Chinese people love these old poem plays very much and will go to see them again and again.

There was nothing to be seen yet, but it was almost seven o'clock. The music was already playing, and I am sure you would not have liked it. Gongs, cymbals, drums and flutes made a noise that to our ears would be quite dreadful. In their turn, Chinese people think that our kind of music is very unpleasant to listen to, so it would not be polite for us to say unkind things about theirs.

For a few minutes every one waited, and then the show started. Two generals were at war with one another. Their robes were gaily colored and their faces painted as though they wore masks. They fought with swords that flashed as they fenced together. They leaped about, and when the weapons came too close they would escape by turning a back somersault that would put a circus clown to shame.

At last one of the warriors pretended to be wounded and fell to the floor. The winner flashed his sword once more in triumph, and then wandered to the side of the stage to drink a bowl of tea. While he rested, a man with his face painted like a monkey's, amused the people with songs and jokes. Another dressed as a woman also sang while the monkey-faced man played all sorts of tricks.

By this time the injured man had recovered from his wound, and the other had finished his bowl of tea. While the former also drank his tea, the winner sang a song telling the audience that he was the greatest fighter that had ever been known. He sang of his prowess with sword and spear, and that none could vanquish him. At this point the injured warrior decided that the other had bragged enough, and to the delight of the watching people, another battle started.

This time it was much longer and very thrilling. The gleaming blades flashed and whirled too fast for the eye to follow. Leaping and turning somersault after somersault, the two generals fought. The people watched spellbound. The band excelled itself in noises of all kinds, playing louder and louder as the duel continued. At last the players succeeded in wounding one another and the play ended.

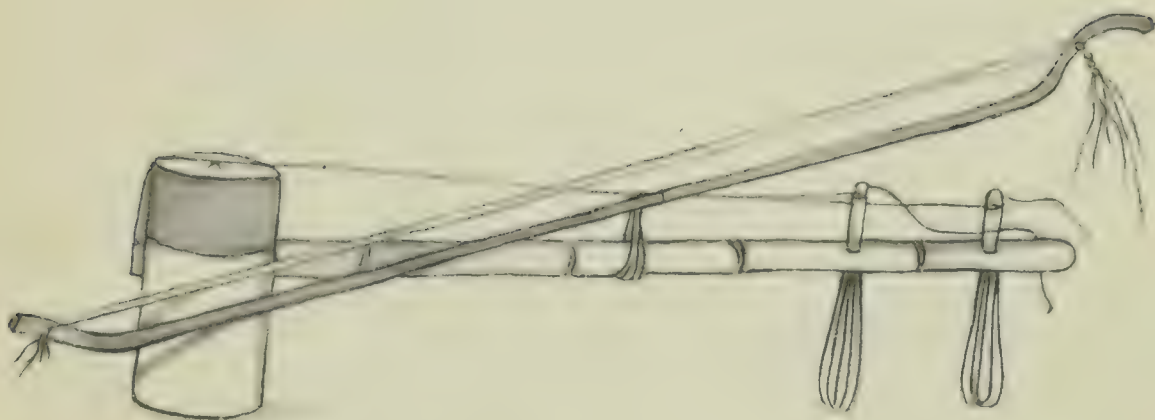
The audience started to go home. Here and there some people lingered to watch the lion or the stilt dancers, but Dee Dee had fallen asleep on his father's shoulder and Ger Ger could hardly keep his eyes open.

The next day the children returned to the temple yard in hope of seeing more of the acrobats, but they were disappointed. They had departed with the sunrise. Nothing was left of the bright lights, or gaudy colors, or the noisy orchestra. There certainly was enough noise, but that came from the daily market that was in full swing. Fruit and vegetable sellers, fish hawkers and meat vendors, were all crying their wares. Women and children were buying food for the day, and chattering with the salesmen; but of the actors there was nothing to be seen.

As they turned homeward, Ah Ling came running up to them. They told him all about the night before and about the play they had seen. He was very interested.

"Let's pretend that we are actors, and fight battles too," he said.

It was a good plan, and in less time than it takes to tell, the boys had armed themselves with sticks and had become warriors. The girls and smaller children sat by and watched them, and great were the battles that were fought!



THE HOLIDAYS

"When do the holidays start?" asked Ger Ger one morning as he sat at breakfast.

"Next week," answered Mei Mei, between spoonfuls of soft rice porridge. "I mean, school stops for a month until the Lantern Festival."

"That's nice, because we haven't had any good things to eat for a long time."

"Why, Ger Ger, we always have good things to eat!"

"We don't have feasts *every* day. I mean specially good things."

Mei Mei did not answer. It was nearly time to go to school, and her bowl of soft rice was not finished. Both children looked much fatter than they did in summer time. The weather had turned cold suddenly and each had on at least five extra coats, one over the other. Their home did not have stoves or fire-places to keep them warm, so they put on more and more clothes as the days grew shorter and colder. In the cotton shop over the way, a

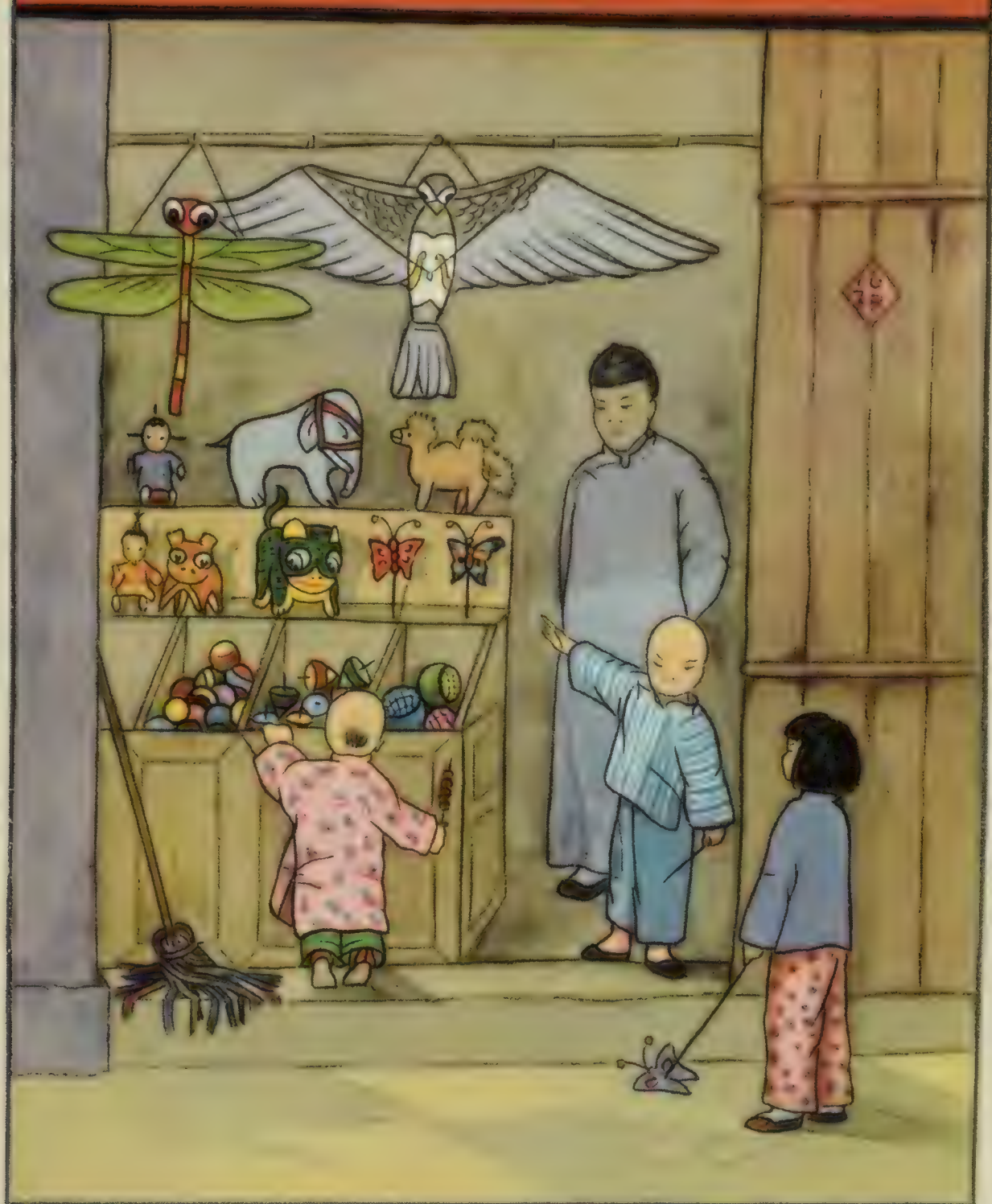
gentle tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . whirrrr . . . tick . . . tick . . . whirrrr . . . could be heard all day as the workmen beat the cotton into fluffy heaps. Later it would be patted into a soft downy quilt covered by a loosely woven net-work of colored threads. Mei Mei had helped her mother, several afternoons after school, make a new cover for one of these soft quilts, carefully stitching gaily colored cloth all around it.



A light flurry of snow had proved that winter had really come, and every one had stuffed cracks and crevices between doors and windows with paper to keep out the cold winds. Very often the children had seen long lines of wild geese flying overhead, and had heard their sad honking cry. Now that winter had set in, every one was making ready for the holidays—the most important time of the year.

Just suppose you never had a birthday celebration. Just suppose

春和玩具舖



THE TOY SHOP

your father and mother worked all year, even on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Just suppose that there never was a real holiday at all except at Christmas time—wouldn't it be an even happier time than it already is?

That is what happens in China. There, every day, the people work, and work hard, with never a Sunday or a day of rest. When the New Year approaches every one begins to get excited, because New Year is birthday, and Christmas, and Easter and Sundays, and Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, all rolled into one! You can imagine how busy every one is because the holidays are coming and there is so much to be done.

When Ger Ger and Mei Mei had had about a week's vacation, the busiest time of all started. The first thing to be done was to clean the house. On the twentieth day of the "Bitter Moon" every house in China *must* be cleaned. Such scrubbing and polishing takes place then, both inside and out. Mei Mei helped her mother and sister indoors. Every corner was swept, every shelf dusted, and every bit of brass and silver polished until it gleamed. The whole house was put in apple-pie order. The doors leading to the courtyard were all repainted, and Ger Ger did his share by helping to whitewash the walls. Even the oiled paper in the windows was removed, and new paper pasted in its place. It took quite three days to get the whole house spick and span.

Then the shopping started. Mrs. Chung and her two daughters had a great deal to do. Pedlars with fat ducks and chickens came to the door. Others brought heaped-up baskets of green and white cabbage, bunches of garlic, red and green peppers or pinky-red onions. The meat and sauce shops were so crowded that Mei Mei could hardly squeeze in. She followed her mother to market every day, carrying the all-important scales, because that shrewd lady weighed everything herself, afraid that the market men might cheat her.

Four days before New Year's Eve a very important event took place. This was the day that the Kitchen God went to Heaven to report about the people with whom he lived.

The Kitchen God is a very important person in China. In very poor families his picture is pasted on the wall of the kitchen near the stove; but in the Chung family's kitchen, he had a little bamboo and paper house that was placed in a niche above the stove. There he kept watch over the family and saw whether they behaved or not. It was Dah Fei's duty to place a tiny bowl of tea, and another of rice, in his house every day. This was done in every single home in China, because the Kitchen God is never neglected.

On the day of his feast, Ger Ger watched his mother and big sister prepare all kinds of goodies in tiny dishes. Everything was sweet—bits of melon, candied fruits, honey cakes, and sweet, sticky rice—so that only sweet words might fall from the Kitchen God's lips when he made his report to the Lord of Heaven.

"Why do you make such a little bit of everything?" asked the little boy.

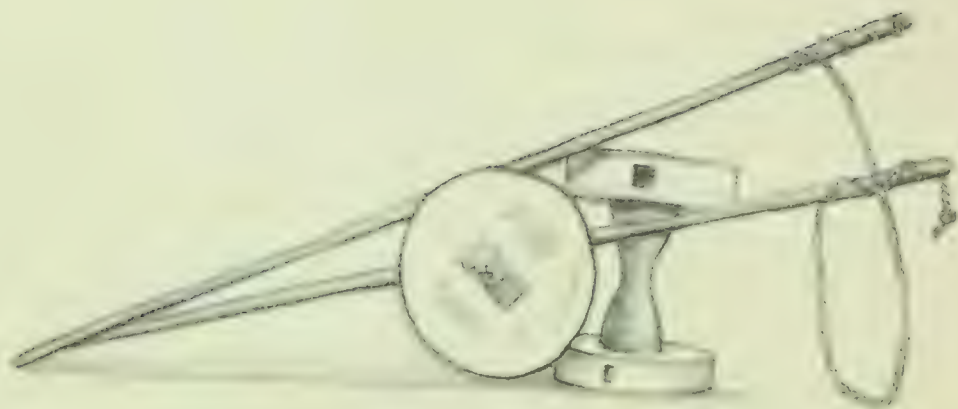
"Because this food is for the Kitchen God alone," was the reply.

"Can't I have some too? It looks so good," he begged, but his mother firmly refused him. These little bowls of food were not for the family.

When everything was ready, the little bamboo house with the Kitchen God's image inside was taken out into the courtyard. The food was placed before it, and a priest, who had come specially, solemnly read some prayers. Mr. Chung, as head of the family, bowed before the little house and lighted a pair of tall candles that stood on either side. After some more bows and prayers, a big bunch of fire crackers was lighted, the little house was set aflame, and with a rush of noise and a whirl of smoke the Kitchen God went to Heaven.

When there was nothing left but a small heap of gray ashes,

every one hurried back to their tasks. Now the last and most urgent preparations had to be finished as quickly as possible. New Year presents had to be bought, and enough extra food to last a week, because all the shops would be closed. Everything must be ready beforehand, because during the holidays no food must be cooked and no knife touched. You might cut Good Luck, and that would be a dreadful misfortune!



THE NEW YEAR

The last day of the year had come. Crimson good luck signs had been pasted on the doors and windows. The well in the courtyard was carefully sealed up—after a three-day supply of water had been drawn—so that the spirits of the well might also have a holiday. The house had been decorated with scarlet lanterns and fir branches, and sprays of Heavenly Bamboo, which looks somewhat like mountain ash, with its clusters of scarlet berries. The whole family had been bathed and dressed in their very best silken coats.

Mei Mei and Ger Ger were quite excited because they had received such nice presents. They had not been given as many toys as you would get at Christmas time, because it is not the custom, but they were very happy. Each had been given a diabolo and plenty of sweets. Ger Ger had a new blue silk coat and a fine fur cap with ear flaps, a pair of black velvet slippers lined with warm felt, and a pair of warm red knitted gloves. Best of all he had a wrist watch—a thing he had seen in the shop windows, but had never hoped to possess! Mei Mei also had a new silk

gown, slippers, and gloves, but instead of a watch, she had a pair of earrings in the shape of dainty gold flowers. She was very proud of them.

On the last evening of the year, the Kitchen God returned from his visit to Heaven. That is, a new little image of him was placed in a new little house in the niche above the stove. Tall red candles and incense burnt before it, and the whole family welcomed him back. Wine and food were placed before the little shrine, because the Kitchen God was sure to be hungry after his long journey. When they had wished him welcome, the family left him alone in the kitchen that he might eat and rest.

Out in the courtyard big glowing lanterns showed an altar table with tall red candles and piles of fruit. Here all the family bowed to Heaven and Earth to wish the old year farewell. Then the household gods were worshiped while fire crackers banged and ghost money went up in clouds of smoke.

After this came the feast. What a lot of good things there were! Ger Ger was sure he would never be able to eat some of every dish, and yet he hated to miss anything! The names alone of some of them made his mouth water. There were "golden coins," "fairy chicken," "pork patties," "lotus bud rolls," and of course the meat dumplings called "chu po po." Ger Ger tried very hard to taste everything, but he could not manage it. Anyway he had the comforting feeling that he had done his best!

At midnight the air was filled with the banging of fire crackers by the hundred. You never heard such a noise as a small Chinese village can make on New Year's Eve! Every one shoots off hundreds of fire crackers at the same time. In San Cha Tse the air was filled with gun-powder smoke and flying bits of paper. Mei Mei and Ger Ger had big bunches of little crackers that went off all together with a tremendous rattle, while their father lighted huge red and green ones that boomed like cannons.

When the New Year was three hours old, the banging and popping stopped for a while. At this time every one knelt once more before the family altars to make the New Year welcome. It was a solemn moment, and a hush lay over the entire village. It



did not last long, however; soon the crackers were booming as loudly as ever. It was very late, especially for the children. Roly-poly Ger Ger and Mei Mei were nodding in their chairs. Their mother sent them to bed, and in spite of all the noise, they were asleep in two minutes.

The next four days were spent in feasting and pleasure, but on the fifth day the house was cleaned out once more. After so many holidays the children were glad to have some work to do again. Ger Ger helped take down the lanterns and other decorations. He ran back and forth carrying tall candlesticks and pretty fruit dishes from the altar to the cupboards where they were kept until the next great occasion. The shop was re-opened and the house swept. "The holidays were broken," as the saying goes.

When all the doors and windows had been thrown open, the

evil spirits who might try to spoil the New Year had to be driven away. Mrs. Chung took a small pan with vinegar and heated it over some glowing coals. When it was hot she waved the pot with the steaming liquid in every corner of the rooms; under chairs and tables, under beds, behind cupboards and doors, so that any lurking wickedness would be driven away.

"It is a pity that it isn't always New Year," sighed Ger Ger that evening, as he put on his fine new coat when he had finished helping. "We have such good times, and such nice things to eat."

"If it were always like this, what would you do for a holiday?" demanded Dah Fei. "You would not be nearly so happy, because it would be the same every day."

Ger Ger had never thought about this, and after a moment he decided that Dah Fei was right. He heard the singing whirr of a diabolo out of doors, and taking a handful of sweet stuff, he went out also. He stood watching Ling Shiou as she whirled her toy on the string between the two sticks, tossed it high into the air, and caught it again. As Ger Ger munched his candy, he nodded his head to himself. Yes, the holidays certainly were fine. It was only a pity that he could not eat more.

Some day you may sail west—first to Japan, and then on to China—and see all these things we have told you of, and many more. You will see Ger Ger and Mei Mei and Dee Dee and all their friends in the streets of every town or village. There will be so many strange things to see, that you will be surprised when you come to something familiar.

Familiar things like fields of yellow mustard, that smell just as sweet as in your country; buttercups and violets and bluebells and pussy willows come in spring; rabbits pop out of holes, blackbirds sing, golden orioles build their deep swinging nests. Boys play marbles and girls play jacks with pebbles instead of little iron crosses, but the game is just the same.

Isn't it strange that people who live so differently from ourselves should see and do so many things we do? If some of you should ever journey across the Pacific Ocean to this strange land, after reading the story of Ger Ger and Mei Mei, you will be able to understand many of the curious things you see.



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